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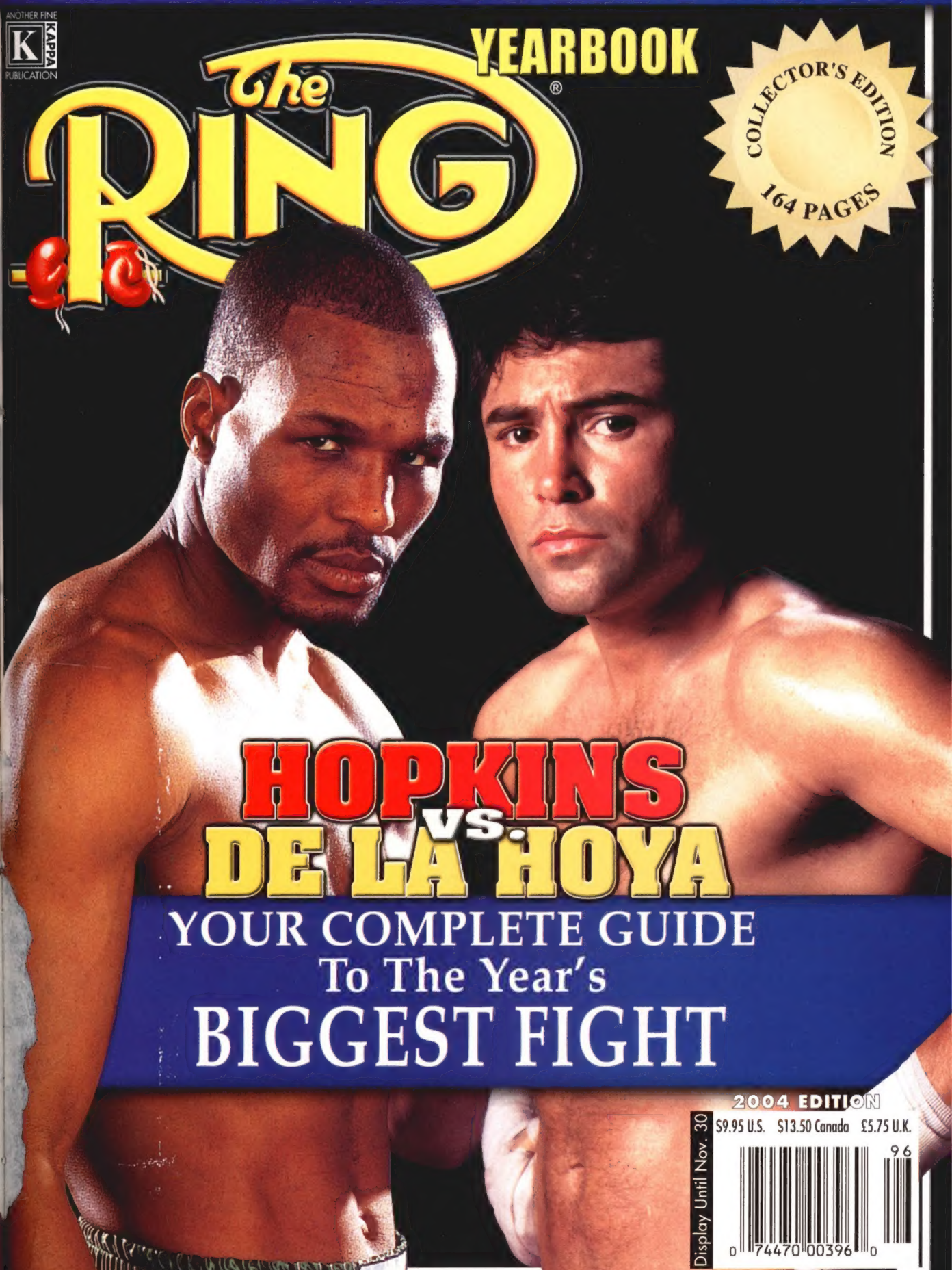

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The RING YEARBOOK

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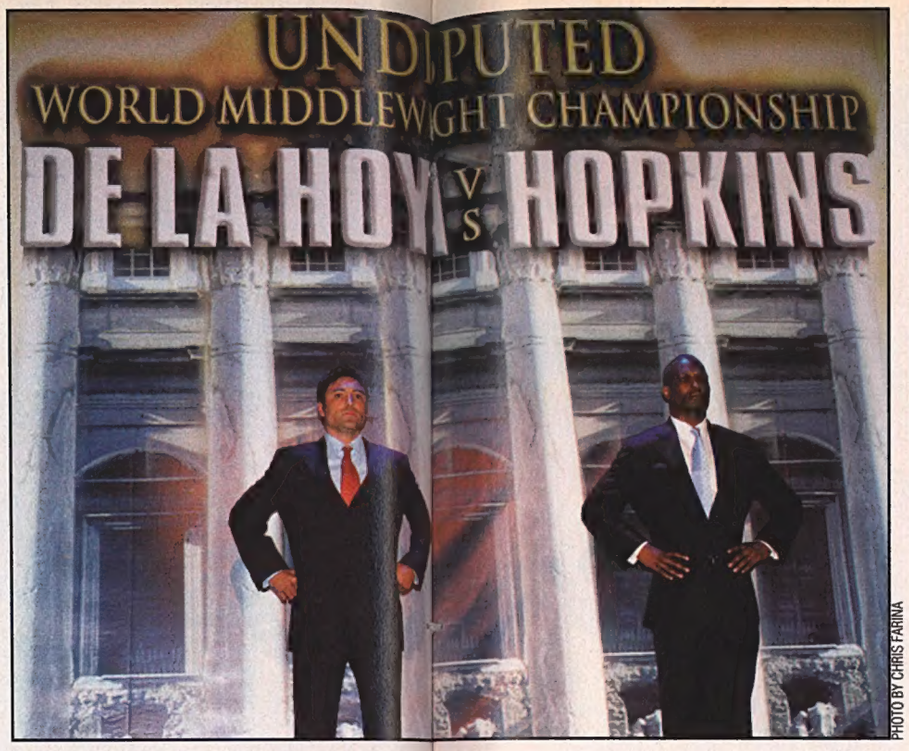

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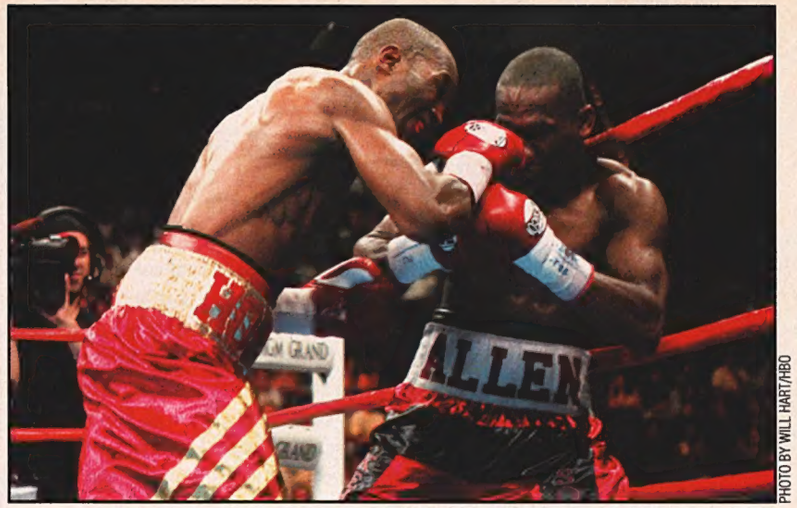

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of THE RING YEARBOOK is a groundbreaking event in boxing journalism. Never before in the 82-year history of THE RING have we published an entire magazine dedicated to previewing a single fight. But special fights deserve special treatment, and the September 18 showdown between world middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins and challenger Oscar De La Hoya is very special indeed. It could, in fact, surpass De La Hoya's 1999 bout with Felix Trinidad and become the largest grossing non-heavyweight fight of all-time.

In order to give the Hopkins-De La Hoya superfight the in-depth prefight coverage it deserves, we've not only delved into every possible aspect of the fight in great detail, but have also included several historical pieces in order to provide a broader perspective.

The proud history of the middleweight division is one of the many intriguing factors that make the Hopkins-De La Hoya fight so compelling. De La Hoya will be following a path blazed by some of his most distinguished predecessors, legendary fighters such as Ray Robinson, Henry Armstrong, and Ray Leonard. For some this path led to greater glory, while for others it ended in bitter disappointment.

Since the dawn of the gloved era, 16 reigning or former welterweight titleholders attempted to capture the middleweight title. To date, 10 have been successful, but only six of them have won the undisputed 160-pound championship, which is what De La Hoya will be shooting for against Hopkins. Only time will tell if "The Golden Boy," who held the WBC welterweight belt from April 1997 until September '99 and again briefly in 2000, is destined to become number seven.

Hopkins and De La Hoya have a rich heritage to live up to in more ways than one: Since THE RING began selecting a Fighter of the Year in 1928, a middleweight has won 13 times, including Hopkins in 2001. Moreover, since we started picking a Fight of the Year in 1945, 14 of the winners have been middleweight bouts. If Hopkins-De La Hoya lives up to expectations, there's a good chance additional honors will be bestowed on the division.

But no fight is just about money, stats, and history. They are also about the individuals involved, and few matches have ever pitted two more diverse personalities than De La Hoya and Hopkins. Oscar has been a media darling throughout his career, a polite, soft-spoken hunk who makes women swoon and turnstiles click. Hopkins is the ex-con from the mean streets of Philly, a blue-collar hero who has turned his life around through boxing. Some would say Oscar is the hero and Bernard the villain. But that's too simplistic. What Hopkins has done to turn his life around since getting out of prison should also make him a hero to all who believe that everybody deserves a second chance.

But despite these superficial differences, Hopkins and De La Hoya have several important things in common, including a deep love of boxing, an unquenchable desire to succeed, and a genuine warrior's mentality. Put it all together, along with the skills and ring smarts they've developed in a combined 88 professional fights, and you have all the earmarks of a classic.

But while we are very optimistic, THE RING obviously can't guarantee that the fight will be worthy of such an unprecedented preview issue. I can, however, assure readers that the coverage of the fight, which will appear in the February 2005 issue of THE RING EXTRA (on sale November 23, 2004), will be spectacular.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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De La Hoya-Hopkins

10 BURNING QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED

By William Dettloff

Questions are what make interesting fights interesting. There are a ton of them around the Hopkins-De La Hoya superfight, and most of them, not surprisingly, concern De La Hoya. (Isn't everything always about him?) All Hopkins has to do is get out of bed on September 18, pull on a pair of trunks, and he's ready to go. He is what he is. We know what to expect. Everybody does. De La Hoya is not such an easy proposition. There are lots of questions around him, even if you think he's going to be impersonating a tent peg by the third round. We ask and answer some of those questions on the following pages (and even came up with a few for Hopkins). This fight gets more interesting all the time.

1

Is it the mismatch it looks like on paper?

Not likely. While we won't know for certain until the first bell rings, there are good reasons to believe that this will be a competitive, exciting fight. First, when was the last time you saw De La Hoya get blown out—by anyone? It's never happened. Two of his three losses have been by controversial decision, the other by close, but sound decision. You could say he's never been blown out because he never fought Hopkins before, but nor has Hopkins fought anyone, in the last several years at least, with the kind of speed and smarts that De La Hoya has. The last one? Roy Jones, who decisioned him. We know—Hopkins is better now and De La Hoya isn't Jones, but speed is speed. If a certain style troubles you, it always troubles you. No matter the outcome, this looks to us like a good, competitive fight.

2

If De La Hoya couldn't hold off Shane Mosley for 12 rounds, how's he going to hold off Hopkins?

He can't. That's De La Hoya's big problem: Even if he is able to get an early lead on Hopkins, which would seem likely given Hopkins' tendency to start slowly, how will he fend him off as he fades and Hopkins gains momentum later? Conventional thinking says that Hopkins is bigger, better, and stronger than Mosley is. That's two-thirds true; he's bigger and better than Mosley, but not necessarily stronger. He's more of a mechanic than is Mosley, who essentially just used his superior strength to wear down De La Hoya in their second fight. Either way, Hopkins will be the stronger guy when he meets De La Hoya and he has excellent stamina. That means De La Hoya probably won't be able to hold him off, particularly late. He'll have to build a big enough lead early to sustain him on the cards and then somehow survive the late rounds. It's a tall order.

3

Is De La Hoya as poor a middleweight as he appeared to be against Sturm?

No, so long as he remembers that he doesn't have to weigh 160 pounds to fight as a middleweight. He can weigh as little as he likes and as long as he's fighting a middleweight, he's a middleweight. The mistake he made against Sturm was coming in at the division limit of 160 pounds. Whether that was deliberate or the result of lax training or both, you can be sure De La Hoya and his team won't make the same mistake with Hopkins. It would be disastrous. He knows now, if he didn't before, that he needs just to show up at his best fighting weight. If he does just that and nothing else, he's already a better middleweight than the bloated, pudgy pretender who labored against Sturm and was fortunate to get the decision.

4

Does De La Hoya hit hard enough to hurt Hopkins?

Not even close. De La Hoya clearly is no puncher at 160. He showed that against Sturm. But he was no big puncher either at 154, or 147. De La Hoya's days of overpowering guys pretty much ended around the time he left the junior welterweight division. You remember: He stopped Rafael Ruelas (KO 2), Genaro Hernandez (KO 6), Jesse James Leija (KO 2), Darryl Tyson (KO 2), and Julio Cesar Chavez (KO 4). In his 18 fights since Chavez, he's gone the distance nine times. When he scores knockouts now, they aren't so much about power as they are speed. So, no, he doesn't hit hard enough to hurt Hopkins. The good news for De La Hoya is that he hasn't relied on a big punch in a long time. And for the most part, he's kept winning anyway.

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Once Hopkins throws his attack into high gear, it can be next to impossible to hold him off. This could spell big trouble for De La Hoya.

5

Will Hopkins finally start to act his age?

Your guess is as good as ours. It doesn't appear likely. At age 39, Hopkins dissected Robert Allen with his usual aplomb last time out and didn't show any signs of slowing down. You might consider that Allen, a slow-footed plodder, wouldn't be the kind of guy necessarily who would expose any degradation in Hopkins' skills; he's not fast enough to. And even with that, he did land several clubbing right hooks on Hopkins' jaw. But Hopkins is the kind of guy who relies on technique and strategy more than physical ability, and that's why he's still fighting so well at this age. It's not about speed and power with him; it's about smarts, mechanics, and resolve. That said, he still has to be able to get close to his guy in order to hit him. Whether or not his 39-year-old legs can get him close to De La Hoya, we'll find out.

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya wades into Felix Sturm in "The Golden Boy's" first outing as a middleweight. Even though he landed plenty of punches, Oscar never really hurt Sturm, which makes many question his ability to hurt Hopkins. De La Hoya's power has generally diminished as he's risen in weight.

6

This is by far the biggest fight of Hopkins' career; how will he handle the pressure?

If you're looking for reasons to support De La Hoya, you could convince yourself that Hopkins might get a little shy in what is by far the highest-profile fight of his career. It's happened to other guys; Marvin Hagler froze a little not only in his fight against Sugar Ray Leonard, but also against Roberto Duran. De La Hoya isn't in the same league as either of those guys, but it was more the size of the event that did it to Hagler. You could say, too, that Hopkins wasn't himself against Roy Jones. Still, this shouldn't be a problem against De La Hoya. Hopkins was brilliant against Felix Trinidad in his other very big fight, and if Hopkins is anything, he's confident. He believes he should have been here, at this level, all along. To him it will feel like home.

7

Speaking of Leonard-Hagler, how valid are the comparisons to that fight?

They are and they aren't: De La Hoya is moving up in weight, as was Leonard. Hopkins is a dominant, undisputed, long-reigning middleweight champion, as was Hagler. De La Hoya is the media darling and Olympic gold medal winner, like Leonard, while Hopkins is the working-man's blue-collar champion, like Hagler. The major difference is that Hagler was much farther gone than Hopkins appears to be. He clearly was slowing down and had all hell beating John Mugabi before the Leonard fight, while Hopkins looks about as good as he ever has. Also, three years before, Leonard had left the game as a dominant fighter, his only loss (to Roberto Duran) easily avenged. De La Hoya isn't nearly as dominant as Leonard was, though he has been active. The bottom line is that although there are things that the fight and the fighters share in common, they won't have any bearing on what happens in the ring in September.

8

Will Hopkins' me-vs.-the world mindset change now that he has his big-money dream fight? Will it affect his performance?

It's not likely, but it is possible. So

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

At 39 going on 40, Hopkins will be fighting Father Time as well as De La Hoya. Who knows when age will finally catch up with him, but there were no signs of erosion in his 12-round unanimous decision over Robert Allen on June 5.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

De La Hoya has never been stopped in 40 pro bouts, but as is evident from this photo, he did get hit quite a lot by Sturm. We'll have to wait and see if Hopkins can be the first to kayo the former Olympic champion.

much of Hopkins' drive comes from his iconoclastic view of himself. It's what defines him. Well, this fight means he's not the outsider anymore. He's part of the fight game mainstream, one of the haves, no longer one of the have-nots. He has no promoter to be mad at—to the contrary, he's said nothing but nice things about Bob Arum—he's making a boatload of money, and he's in a huge fight. Unless he manufactures some new injustice to rail against—maybe a Mexican-American will be selected to referee—he has every reason to be downright placid. And it wouldn't be the first time an artist lost his edge because he got exactly what he'd always wanted.

9

Is this the fight where De La Hoya gets stopped?

It's a greater possibility than ever before, and that's not even assuming, as many do, that it's a mismatch. It could be a competitive, evenly contested fight all along and Hopkins could land that combination or bodyshot that ends it. Or, more likely, he could whittle down De La Hoya round-by-round so that by the ninth or 10th, De La Hoya folds. Remember, though, that Hopkins isn't a big puncher. And De La Hoya has a very good chin. If De La Hoya gets stopped, it will likely be late and the result of a lot of solid punches scored over the duration of the fight. If you're looking for De La Hoya to walk into something and get starched the way Roy Jones did against Antonio Tarver, you're probably going to be disappointed.

10

Will De La Hoya retire if he loses?

Forget it. Unless he gets truly beaten up, something on par with what Hopkins did to poor William Joppy, there's no way De La Hoya quits if he loses. Why should he? He's the guy with nothing to lose here. He's expected to lose. A loss to Hopkins doesn't mean he can't fight Shane Mosley again or Felix Trinidad, and it doesn't mean he loses his stature as the biggest draw in the business. There are plenty of fights out there for De La Hoya at junior middleweight. There's no shame in losing to Hopkins, and even De La Hoya's myriad business interests and hobbies wouldn't be enough to placate him, at just 31 years old, into easy retirement. If he takes a bad beating, you might hear him announce his retirement at the press conference, but don't buy it. He's a fighter. In truth, a victory over Hopkins will get him closer to retirement than a defeat would. ■

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

LESSON

Sturm showed

As he raises his arm in triumph, De La Hoya's frowning face tells another story. In winning a decision over Sturm to keep his fight with Bernard Hopkins alive, "The Golden Boy" gave arguably the worst performance of his career.

LEARNED?

Oscar what NOT to do

By Don Stradley

After the final bell of his surprisingly tough fight with Felix Sturm, one of Oscar De La Hoya's handlers grabbed a towel and quickly wiped the blood from his nose. With one swipe, De La Hoya's reddened face looked good as new and ready to face the cameras.

It's too bad that towel can't be applied to De La Hoya's entire being, because everything about "The Golden Boy" could use a good wipedown these days.

When the verdict was announced in De La Hoya's favor, the crowd didn't exactly erupt in a chant of "bulls___," but they didn't exactly cheer their throats raw, either. Many accepted the win as a gift decision to guarantee De La Hoya's September showdown with Bernard Hopkins. This line of thinking isn't unusual in

PHOTO BY JED JACOBOWSKI/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya went after Sturm early, and landed enough shots like this right hand to build a lead. But as De La Hoya began to fade, the little-known German proved to be a tougher opponent than Oscar—or almost anyone else—expected.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It seemed like a good strategy for Sturm to raise his arms and move away at the end of each round so that De La Hoya couldn't produce a late rally, but it may have cost him on the scorecards. If the judges were looking for an excuse to give The Golden Boy the close rounds, Sturm's posturing was it.

boxing, especially since De La Hoya's presence in Las Vegas boosts the economy like no fighter since Mike Tyson, but calling the decision a gift implies that De La Hoya didn't work for it and was soundly beaten. The truth is that he worked very hard on June 5. It just happened to be one of those fights where many of the rounds were close, and people saw what they wanted to see: De La Hoya's supporters saw him outworking Sturm; Sturm's supporters saw him landing the better punches.

It was truly a fight that could have gone either way. Unfortunately, the mainstream got wind of yet another De La Hoya fight that ended with a whiff of controversy, and word quickly spread that the star fighter had come out on the winning end of an all-out robbery.

"It was a close fight," De La Hoya said, conceding that his aggressive strategy had failed and that he'd tried too hard for a knockout. "I know in my heart I can do better." Fortunately for De La Hoya, it was a night where punches thrown meant more to the judges than punches landed.

"Everything went wrong tonight," De La Hoya told HBO's Larry Merchant. "Everything. I trained as hard as I can. But then I stepped in the ring and *boom*, nothing."

That De La Hoya trained hard is questionable—his high-riding protective cup was working double-time as a girdle—and there were rumors of a back problem during the days leading up to the fight. But the main cause of De La Hoya's problems at the MGM Grand was the other man in the ring, and we don't mean referee Vic Drakulich. But what made Sturm so difficult?

It would be easy to say Sturm's classy left jab was the reason he did so well, but De La Hoya knew of Sturm's jab and had trained accordingly. De La Hoya's focus may have been hampered by the promise of a big money fight with Hopkins, but money isn't new to De La Hoya. Sturm's greatest weapon may have been his legitimate middleweight bone structure. For years, De La Hoya has enjoyed advantages in height and reach, but against Sturm he didn't have these luxuries.

Telefutura broadcaster Bernardo Osuna thought De La Hoya was psyched out by Sturm's strength.

"The key to Sturm's success was that he took Oscar's initial barrage and kind of laughed it off," Osuna said. "Psychologically, I think that affected Oscar."

Along with Sturm's size advantage, the German also had remarkable confidence.

Noted trainer Harold Knight said, "Oscar overlooked this guy. They believed he was an easy touch, but he said, 'I watched Oscar all the time. He's my idol.' It was like Antonio Tarver said about Roy Jones: He had studied him. And Oscar was like Jones, in his own stratosphere, and didn't look in his rearview mirror."

Sturm was considered safe because his

After De La Hoya took off his robe, it became immediately apparent that the multi-division titlist hadn't trained his hardest for this fight. It's clear that De La Hoya isn't a true middleweight, but for better or worse, that's the division he's fighting in now.

record showed only nine knockouts in 20 fights, but De La Hoya's brain trust should have considered that light-hitting fighters are often defensive wizards. De La Hoya's camp should have also checked into Sturm's past. They would have learned that in May 2003, Sturm won a 10-round decision over South Africa's Tshepo Mashego while nursing a broken left hand, an indication that Sturm possessed some serious toughness. As Hopkins said of Sturm later, he didn't come all the way from Germany just to lie down.

"European guys are very, very strong guys," Sturm said after the fight, the tone in his voice reflecting the decades that European fighters have been dismissed by Americans.

As for De La Hoya, his postfight comments were reminiscent of what Sugar Ray Leonard said after fighting Kevin Howard, a fight that saw Leonard decked before winning by stoppage.

"It just wasn't there," Leonard said in 1984. "It's a scary feeling to get in the ring knowing you don't have it."

De La Hoya, 37-3 (29), certainly didn't have it, and his frowning face showed it. De La Hoya usually enjoys his work—he's always beamed like Mickey Mouse while causing an opponent's blood to spurt—but there was no joy in his performance against Sturm.

De La Hoya's plan was obvious from the opening bell. Hell-bent on blowing Sturm away with sheer volume, he dominated the first round by throwing an alarming 103 punches. The crowd loved it. Just as Elvis Presley's fans still adored him after he'd gained weight near the end of his career, the 13,041 in attendance ignored De La Hoya's pudgy physique and geared up for what Merchant snidely called "a star turn."

De La Hoya's busy punch rate was effective for a while. He looked especially good in the fourth when he stung Sturm with a combination. But something unexpected was happening. Sturm, 20-1 (9), wasn't blinded by The Golden Boy's aura and went about his business as if this were just another night in Hamburg. Sturm didn't throw deadly punches, but he snapped De La Hoya's head back more than once, and in the fifth he landed a left to the jaw that bothered De La Hoya. Sturm even wised up to De La Hoya's round-stealing tactics and began moving away near the end of each session. He cockily waved his gloves at De La Hoya, beckoning him to fight.

Sturm's jab moved in and out like a trained snake during the sixth and seventh, while De La Hoya, although wilting, flailed away at Sturm's body. Sturm took the eighth and ninth rounds, but De La Hoya found some success in the 10th by whipping right leads to Sturm's face, winning the round on all three scorecards.

Sturm changed to a southpaw stance in the 11th, perhaps trying to throw his left with a little more juice on it. He won the round, putting him within range of a draw. Now the stage was set for De La Hoya's big finale, and perhaps the most important three minutes of his career.

Not quite on his toes but not quite flat-footed, as if having so many trainers over the years had finally sapped him of a recognizable style, De La Hoya began the final round with a pair of rights, and then spent a full minute firing staccato style to Sturm's head and body. It wasn't exactly magical, but on a night when De La Hoya didn't have his best stuff, it was admirable. Sturm remained cool during De La Hoya's final flurry, popped him a few times in return, and spent the closing moments of the fight moving away with De La Hoya in weary pursuit. Seconds before the final bell, De La Hoya threw one last rapier left; it hit nothing.

De La Hoya's rally may have been all sizzle and no steak, but judges Dave Moretti, Paul Smith, and Mike Glienna scored the round in his favor. Each of their final scores read 115-113 for De La Hoya.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

De La Hoya's body attack was noteworthy, but so was the fact that it never visibly affected Sturm. Regardless, Oscar swept the 12th round on all three judges' scorecards with his aggression, allowing him to pull out the controversial win.

"He showed he can pull it out in the last couple of rounds with combinations when everyone maybe expected him to fade," said Hopkins, relieved that his megabucks fight with De La Hoya was still intact. But the verdict has drawn mixed reviews.

"If you go by the old axiom that the challenger must decisively beat the champion, Oscar didn't do that," said Osuna, referring to Sturm's WBO belt. That axiom is nowhere to be found in any official rulebook, but even if we were to follow it, De La Hoya is bigger than any alphabet strap, and fighters like Sturm have to work harder when facing a fighter of De La Hoya's stature. Sturm did plenty of posturing—he raised his arms in victory all night—but as Teddy Atlas pointed out on ESPN2's *Tuesday Night Fights*, Sturm would have helped his cause by throwing more than one punch at a time.

De La Hoya was honest with HBO's Larry Merchant after the fight, telling him, "Everything went wrong tonight." With a much tougher challenge awaiting him next, De La Hoya, who seems caught between styles, needs to make things go right in a hurry.

Knight wondered if Sturm's tactic of moving away at the end of certain rounds was a mistake in such a close fight.

"Final impressions play a big part with the judges," Knight said. "Sturm finished a lot of rounds by backing away. I would have told him to finish strong. Yeah, he made Oscar look stupid, but you want to end the round strong."

Joe Goossen, who had worked Juan Lazcano's corner earlier that night against Jose Luis Castillo, thought De La Hoya did enough to win, but wonders if De La Hoya's schedule of fighting only once or twice a year has hurt him.

"I heard Oscar say after the fight that he felt sluggish," Goossen said. "That's ring rust."

But Goossen, unlike many, doesn't think De La Hoya's middleweight quest is an impossible dream.

"Roberto Duran was a lightweight who won the middleweight title from a big middleweight, Iran Barkley," said Goossen.

The difference between Duran and De La Hoya is that at age 31 De La Hoya has had only 40 fights, while Duran, at the same age, had twice as many fights under his belt. By the time Duran was taking on middleweights, he knew a million tricks and could feint a man out of his boots. De La Hoya, for all of his years in the ring, isn't crafty. He's simply a melange of conflicting styles.

"I respect Mayweather," said Knight, "but Oscar hasn't adjusted to Mayweather's style."

Knight suggests that the famous Mayweather stance is bad for De La Hoya. "It's a good stance, but it's also messed up his left hook," said Knight. Throwing a hard hook from the Mayweather stance requires De La Hoya to shift his feet, allowing a fast opponent to potshot him. "Plus, Oscar doesn't have a good enough right hand to fight the way Mayweather wants," said Knight.

One also wonders if Mayweather can motivate De La Hoya during difficult fights. At times the trainer seemed tongue-tied in the corner, while De La Hoya seemed distracted and cranky. De La Hoya and Mayweather have always made an odd couple, and on June 5 they lacked chemistry.

While a stronger presence in the corner would have helped De La Hoya against Sturm, it wouldn't have made up for the fact that De La Hoya was so physically overmatched. He was also, for just the second time in his career, fighting someone significantly younger (Fernando Vargas being the first such opponent). Just as Marco Antonio Barrera said of Manny Pacquiao prior to their fight last year, De La Hoya said that Sturm had reminded him of himself in his younger days. Such thoughts must be eerie for a fighter, especially someone like De La Hoya, who has always projected himself as a boy prodigy.

Great fighters eventually alter their styles to suit their fading reflexes. They learn to clinch and conserve energy, and they learn how to pick their spots. Maybe it's time for De La Hoya to learn how to "fight old." After all, at 31, how much longer can De La Hoya have youth on his side? ■

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Boxing's Bobby Fischer:

BERNARD HOPKINS BEGINS HIS ENDGAME

By Mike Houser

Not everyone appreciates a chess master, perhaps least of all the average boxing fan, who may lack the patience to take the time to learn the subtle gambits and brilliant defensive moves that a top-notch player must make on the way to checkmating his opponent.

Maybe that's the reason world middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins has yet to capture the complete adulation of all but the most astute fans. He is Bobby Fischer with boxing gloves, a man with a plan who marches to his own unknown beat, a misunderstood and complex individual whose genius may not be fully appreciated until he is gone from the game.

Against Robert Allen on June 5, Hopkins was defending for the 18th consecutive time the title he won against Segundo Mercado in April 1995, but he began to hear boos in the first round from fans that wanted blood, not genius. With the biggest paycheck of his career only a victory away, the 39-year-old Hopkins was playing it safe in his third matchup with Allen, throwing his heavy artillery sparingly, keeping up his guard, and circling his southpaw opponent, trying to lure him into making the first mistake. Hopkins, perhaps figuring he only has so many great performances left in him, didn't bother to tap into his greatness. Instead, as wise, older fighters often do, he did enough to win nearly every round without overexerting himself.

But the crowd wasn't having it. They paid good money and wanted to see a slugfest a la Hagler-Hearns and Gatti-Ward, not the type of match that was as pleasing to the eye as Rosie O'Donnell wearing a thong and pasties. Still, Hopkins was dominant. The Philadelphia native mixed caution and occasional aggressiveness, dropping Allen, now 36-5 (27), with a quick right hand in the seventh round and then coasting to a lopsided 12-round unanimous decision (119-107 twice and 117-109).

Chess is all about execution, and from opening to endgame, "The Executioner" has shown he has all of the moves during his nine-year reign. He still owns the fastest knockout in the history of the division, catching Steve Frank in a 24-second fool's mate in January 1996. In his December '00 rematch with Antwun Echols, Hopkins arose with a separated shoulder after being bodyslammed to the canvas and proceeded to furiously punish his iron-fisted opponent, notching a 10th-round TKO. He gave unbeaten Felix Trinidad a boxing lesson before stopping him in 12 rounds in September 2001 to earn THE RING's Fighter of the Year award. He has won with power, toughness, and, most recently, intelligence, and at 44-2-1 (31) with one no-contest, Hopkins is once again THE RING's number-one pound-for-pound boxer.

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Hopkins connects with a right hand en route to winning his third match with the outgunned Allen. Hopkins didn't look as sensational as when he knocked Allen out five years earlier, but he didn't need to. The goal for "The Executioner" was just to win, and he did that with ease.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

There are some among boxing's intelligentsia who appreciate Hopkins' increasingly cerebral approach. Former junior welterweight contender Ronnie Shields, who now trains heavyweight contender Dominick Guinn and rising lightweight Juan "The Baby Bull" Diaz, among others, gave an even-handed assessment of Hopkins' performance against Allen.

"I think Hopkins fought a smart fight," Shields said. "He's a boxer. He's not one of those guys that's going to jump on you and kayo you early. He landed good rights on Allen. He boxed and basically beat him up. Allen didn't put forth enough effort. He didn't fight."

ESPN2 *Friday Night Fights* analyst Teddy Atlas agreed.

"Allen's a southpaw, which can make it difficult for the opponent to look good," Atlas said. "Bernard's always been a thinker, a smart boxer. He's a well, well-schooled fighter. He doesn't make the most exciting fights. He doesn't take chances. Bernard's the kind of guy that takes what you give him."

But there was a time when Hopkins was more impulsive, and he paid dearly for his blundering play. When he was 17, he caught a strong-arm robbery conviction that earned him 56 months behind bars in Graterford Prison in Pennsylvania.

Since long before Las Vegas started using the slogan "Whatever happens here, stays here," ex-convicts have abided by the same credo. Hopkins is never at a loss for words, yet he keeps quiet about the things that went on while he was locked up. There is, however, little doubt that at some point during his stretch, he had a long talk with himself. During the 1,600-plus days that he spent among killers, rapists, drug dealers, and other violent offenders, who kept doing what they did best even behind bars, Hopkins began his plan to change his patterns for good.

Like all chess masters, Hopkins learned the virtues of patience, of thinking before you move, and the value of time, how to use it rather than be used by it. Whether it was walking the yard, taking a shower, or going to the chow hall, Hopkins began to see several moves ahead, knowing the first checkmate uttered from one of the dangerous cons around him could be the last.

Hopkins made the right moves and survived, getting out of prison when he was 22. He began his professional boxing career, but more important, his game plan for life worked and he did his nine years of parole without slipping up.

Still, nobody just handed over the formula of success to Hopkins, and he dropped his first professional bout, a four-round decision to Clinton Mitchell in October 1988. He may have lost, but he wasn't defeated. He spent 16 months retooling, and made it all the way to his first title shot before being outmaneu-

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Who knows if Hopkins was really hurt by the fifth-round low blow from Allen, but he sold the foul, and ref Joe Cortez (background) took a point from Allen. Hopkins, a master of mind games, seemed to have Cortez wrapped around his finger throughout the fight.

vered by Roy Jones for the IBF middleweight belt in May '93. Nineteen months later, Hopkins was dropped twice and held to a stalemate by Mercado in his second title opportunity. But he hasn't suffered a loss or a draw since.

In chess, it's just as much what you don't do as it is what you do that determines success. Some of the only people that can appreciate what Hopkins has *not* done are those who have taken the same journey.

Perhaps the last person you'd expect to praise Hopkins is Oscar De La Hoya's trainer, Floyd Mayweather Sr. After all, there's nothing Mayweather seems to enjoy more than creating poems at the expense of "The Golden Boy's" would-be opponents. But when asked about his opinion on what Hopkins has achieved, Mayweather, who served 3½ years on a drug conviction before getting out of prison and staying out, was nothing but respectful.

"Bernard's been through the windmill," Mayweather said. "I know what he's about. We've both been down that same path. It's still on his mind. He's always got to make the right decisions, which way he's going to head. Anyone can make a mistake. It's a whole different ballgame when you come out here. A regular guy gets out and gets shot, gets drunk, shoots somebody, or gets caught stealing. Hopkins has changed his life.

"We [ex-inmates] understand a lot more than people believe. It's a different transition when you get out here. When I got out, my mother was driving 65 miles per hour. I was scared to death. I said, 'Mom, slow down—please.' She was only going the speed limit, but it felt like 100 miles per hour."

Plotting strategy out on the streets is tough enough, but executing tactics in the ring is like speed-chess, which makes it all the more difficult for the average fan to follow the nuances. As with Fischer, an enigmatic person on and off the chessboard, not all of Hopkins' moves in or

PHOTO BY CARLO ALLEGRI/GETTY IMAGES

In the seventh, a right hand to the jaw dropped Allen, and it looked like a stoppage was forthcoming. But Hopkins played it cool, not wanting to make a mistake and blow his promised payday with Oscar De La Hoya.

out of the ring appear to make immediate sense.

Hopkins was highly criticized for failing to make what some thought were the wisest moves following his career-defining win over Trinidad. He turned down $6-million to fight Jones and $4.3-million to fight James Toney. He sat idle for more than a year after passing Carlos Monzon's middleweight record of 14 title defenses before facing unworthy Morrade Hakkar in March '03. But a look back at some of his comments during the Hakkar buildup shows that Hopkins wasn't necessarily acting illogically.

"It ain't how much money you make," Hopkins said. "It's what you do with the money you have. I've been good with my finances ... I come from making no money to making a million-dollar pop a fight. So, is that a curse? Is that something that is horrible? I mean, come on now. There's a good percentage of people in the world that don't see $400,000 or $500,000 in their lifetime. I am blessed. I look around and see where I came from. Those that think they know better think again."

Juxtaposing 56 months in a steel cage with what Hopkins has accomplished since and keeping in mind his opportunities with De La Hoya and others, it's hard to argue with him.

"A lot of people don't like what he does," Mayweather said. "Some people have questions about what he does with his life. But Bernard Hopkins is going to be himself. He and I have the same mentality. You take a fall for doing what you believe in, right or wrong."

Just like the eccentric Fischer kept officials in Iceland on edge before his 1972 World Championship matches with Boris Spassky, Hopkins had Marc Ratner—the executive director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission—and many others nervous by threatening to pull out of the Allen fight if referee Joe Cortez wasn't removed. Hopkins had thrown the Puerto Rican flag down while yelling at Trinidad during a press conference in Puerto Rico and claimed he didn't want to take a chance that Cortez, who is of Puerto Rican descent, would favor Allen because of it.

"Hopkins was very serious about it," Ratner said. "The commission felt strongly that we had appointed the right guy for the fight. A few people talked to Bernard Hopkins before Cortez met with him. I was in doubt till I saw Hopkins at the weigh-in."

Some have said that Hopkins' mind

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It can be hard to find the angles to attack a southpaw like Allen, but Hopkins has proven in their three-fight series, and in other fights with lefties, that he knows how to adapt. Few if any fighters today can match Hopkins when it comes to ring intelligence.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Hopkins and HBO's Larry Merchant look extremely chummy here, but it wasn't long ago that Merchant venomously attacked Hopkins for mismanaging his career. Set to make more than $10-million for his next fight, it looks like The Executioner is having the last laugh.

games ended up working in his favor, as Cortez seemed to bend over backward not to be biased against the champion.

After initially grabbing Hopkins and dragging him back to the middle of the ring so he could get out his "I'm fair, but I'm firm" catchphrase after the prefight instructions, Cortez waited only 30 seconds before warning Allen for holding and hitting. Cortez sounded like boxing's version of *Taxi Driver's* Travis Bickle: "You got a problem? You got a problem? I told you. Don't hit on the break."

Then, in round five, Allen landed a low blow—his first of the fight—and Cortez instantly took away a point. Between rounds six and seven, Cortez again jumped on Allen, getting in his face in the corner and chastising him: "You got a problem? Remember what I told you in the dressing room."

Going over to Hopkins, Cortez was somewhat less threatening. "I want good sportsmanship out there. That's all I want. Okay?"

But according to Ratner, Cortez wasn't favoring Hopkins.

"What people weren't privy to was that before the fight in the dressing room," Ratner said, "Cortez made it very clear that this was their first warning. He said, 'I'm not going to warn you in the fight.'"

In this, his 164th title fight, Cortez was at least firm. And whatever the explanation, Hopkins showed his psychological warfare was as potent as his physical tools, seemingly willing Allen into non-action.

In just a few months, Hopkins will be 40, which is fine for games like chess that only involve the brain. Boxers, on the other hand, rely on their bodies as well, and in the minds of some, Hopkins' failure to knock out a somewhat timid Allen is proof that Father Time is ready to execute The Executioner.

This is not the opinion of HBO's unofficial fight judge Harold Lederman, however.

"Bernard Hopkins didn't look old at all," Lederman said. "He's a safety-first fighter. Robert Allen is a big puncher, but the problem is that he's good against guys he can intimidate. Against Hopkins, he couldn't do a darn thing."

Nor does Shields believe Hopkins is ready for the glue factory.

"Old age will get Hopkins, but *when*?" Shields said with a laugh. "He still looks good. The most important thing is he fights an intelligent fight. Other guys seem to get intimidated by him."

Hopkins has said he wants to defend his title 20 times and get out of boxing by the time he's 42 (no problem there, since he could potentially reach 20 defenses before he even turns 40). He knew exactly how much energy to expend against Allen and he knows exactly how much more he'll need to put out between now and the end of his career. De La Hoya's up next. The winner of a proposed October bout between Trinidad and Ricardo Mayorga could be waiting in the wings. And with Winky Wright in control of the junior middleweights and Jermain Taylor coming of age, Hopkins finds himself in a prime position.

Just like Fischer did to the unknowing chess superstars more than three decades ago, Hopkins has been gradually maneuvering everyone on boxing's chess board right where he wants them: just a move or two from checkmate. ■

Mike Houser is a boxing writer for the Nevada Appeal and a frequent contributor to this magazine.

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W 12 Pernell Whitaker
April 12, 1997, Las Vegas, Nevada

By Johnnie Whitehead

Setting the stage: De La Hoya, making his debut at welterweight after just three bouts at 140 pounds, was taking on the best pound-for-pound fighter of the era in just his 24th pro outing. WBC titlist Whitaker, however, hadn't been looking very good of late. He preserved this superfight with De La Hoya when, trailing on all three scorecards against virtual unknown Diobelys Hurtado, he uncharacteristically scored a knockout to win in the 11th round. The prefight hype got dirty when Whitaker, 40-1-1 (17), suggested De La Hoya hadn't fought any really tough black fighters, and "The Golden Boy" slipped out of politically correct mode and countered that black fighters had no heart and "can't take it to the belly."

What happened: Early on, Whitaker's strategy was to use jabs and clinches, specifically focusing on tying up De La Hoya's lethal left arm whenever the two got close. In the second round, De La Hoya landed a right-hand counter, to which Whitaker responded by showboating with his hands low, even as his opponent charged to do further damage. A mouse rose over the right eye of Whitaker as De La Hoya landed a pair of rights while in a clinch.

In the third, the southpaw Whitaker's jabs were landing flush, and he followed up with a hard left hand. De La Hoya kept coming forward, but couldn't quite touch the elusive veteran with anything clean. Frustrated, De La Hoya slammed him with a kidney shot and punched out of a clinch. Whitaker retaliated by butting and cutting him under the right eye before both fighters fell to the canvas in a tangle. Whitaker tried to rough him up inside, but took a left uppercut off a clinch and then a left hook.

In the fourth, they traded jabs and De La Hoya scored well with a lead right, but he couldn't sustain an attack because of the defensive mastery of Whitaker. He stalked Whitaker in the fifth, firing one-two combinations, though none of them landed. In return, Whitaker stabbed him with lead lefts and jabs as he hot-dogged to the chagrin of the pro-Golden Boy crowd at the Thomas & Mack Center. De La Hoya turned lefty briefly, but accomplished little until the sixth, when, maintaining the stance, he struck gold. He drew Whitaker to lead and countered with a left uppercut that staggered him.

De La Hoya's nose began bleeding in the seventh as he took too many jabs, and by the ninth Whitaker took control inside. De La Hoya, who'd been having traction problems with his shoes, turned southpaw again, but got knocked down when he lunged with a punch. It was mostly the result of a slip, but Whitaker did hit him on the chin, so it was called a knockdown by referee Mills Lane. Whitaker did well in the 10th and 11th, and though he mostly gave away the last round, his superb defense caused De La Hoya to go 0-for-12 with his closing flurry.

De La Hoya finds Whitaker with a right

In a bout that was difficult to score but appeared close to nearly everyone, the judges favored De La Hoya unanimously, by scores of 115-111 and 116-110 (twice). With the exception of the ninth round, when Whitaker was credited with a knockdown, from rounds six through 12 he only won one other round (the 11th) on any of the three judges' scorecards.

It was, to a degree, a disappointing performance from De La Hoya, but it was also a win over a living legend who most felt had never really been beaten prior.

Postscript: A rematch was called for, but never materialized. Whitaker went in and out of drug rehabilitation and never posted another official victory.

W 12 Ike Quartey
February 13, 1999, Las Vegas, Nevada

9

Setting the stage: For possibly the first time in his career, De La Hoya wouldn't have a strength advantage. Detractors believed the pretty boy's lack of toughness would be exposed by Quartey, a strong, sculpted Ghanaian who'd held the WBA strap since 1994.

Quartey was known for a jab that carried the power of a straight right hand, but he'd been inactive for 16 months and his aura of invincibility had been blemished. In his last fight, a controversial draw with Jose Luis Lopez, Quartey was knocked down twice and almost knocked out, though he appeared deserving of a points win. Quartey, 34-0-1 (29), was disgracefully stripped of his belt prior to the pay-per-view showdown with De La Hoya for facing the number-one fighter in his weight class in what should have been a unification bout.

What happened: In the cautious first round, De La Hoya's right-hand parry defused most of the stiff jabs. De La Hoya's nose was bleeding before the round ended—he couldn't parry all of the jabs, as it turned out—and the tone was set for a fight that would come down to the scoring of numerous tight, tactical rounds.

The Golden Boy started the third by scoring with a good right hand off the ropes that put Quartey in retreat. Finding it hard to penetrate the high guard of De La Hoya, Quartey lowered his guard and jabbed from his waist, trying to shoot the gap from up and under. A solid hook stunned De La Hoya with 10 seconds to go, and another rocked him back on his heels.

De La Hoya found success early in the sixth when, after a strong jab, he followed with a hook to floor Quartey, who was going backward trying to throw a hook, too. De La Hoya tried to force the action, but Quartey stepped inside of a jab and landed a lead left hook to score a knockdown of his own. De La Hoya appeared to be genuinely hurt, and Quartey jumped on him at the restart to land a right hand and left hook, causing De La Hoya to hold. A hard right hand buckled De La Hoya, whose left eye began to swell underneath.

After the excitement of the wild sixth, it was back to a jab-a-thon in the seventh. The Golden Boy scored with a pair of short left uppercuts to begin the ninth, but Quartey lit him up with a precision right hand off the ropes. Quartey almost fell after running into a jab to start the 10th, but his jabs were now landing harder and cleaner. After an eventless 11th, De La Hoya knew he had to close strong. Quartey tried to measure him with a right hand to start the 12th, but he missed, and De La Hoya came up with a left hook that sent "Bazooka" to the canvas and the Thomas & Mack Center into a frenzy. Wounded and cornered, Quartey stood his ground and tried to trade, but he got the worst of it as countless left hooks landed flush on his chin. Referee Mitch Halpern nearly halted the fight, but calmly allowed the weary combatants to finish on their feet.

Opinions were varied as to whether the 10-8 final round was enough to pull it out for De La Hoya, even amongst the judges. De La Hoya won a split decision, by tallies of 116-112, 116-113, and 114-115.

Postscript: Quartey, who said he only wanted megafights, was inactive for another year before losing to Fernando Vargas. With a De La Hoya rematch looking highly unlikely, the African soon retired.

Quartey withstands Oscar's furious 12th-round rally

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

8

W 12 John-John Molina
February 18, 1995, Las Vegas, Nevada

Setting the stage: De La Hoya was developing a reputation as a coddled superstar. He was practically handed a title when he beat mediocre Jimmi Bredahl for the WBO junior lightweight belt in 1994, and he picked up his share of doubters after getting knocked down by the anonymous duo of Narciso Valenzuela and Giorgio Campanella.

Molina, 36-3 (26), moving up five pounds after his second reign as the IBF's 130-pound titleholder and on a 15-fight win streak that included 12 knockouts, was the first legitimate threat to spoil De La Hoya's pristine record. He held victories over the likes of Manuel Medina, Goyo Vargas, and Wilson Rodriguez. But the Puerto Rican was coming into De La Hoya territory at the MGM Grand.

What happened: It looked at the start like it would be a short night. A first-round left hook caught Molina coming in and knocked him down, and De La Hoya followed up by taking target practice with both fists. Molina wouldn't back down, but his aggression caused him to be raked with right hands before a jab buckled him to end the first round.

A right hand froze Molina to start the second, and a left hook behind a crisp right hand straightened his legs momentarily. Molina did score with a right hand, but a fusillade of jabs from De La Hoya did more damage. Molina did better in the third when he scored with a few hooks, some bodyshots, a short uppercut inside, and even a few rabbit punches, and by the fourth he managed to change the tide of the fight to his liking. De La Hoya retaliated for the illegal punches, and Molina popped him with a reverse one-two combination, leading with the right hand.

Despite the early knockdown, Molina didn't go quietly

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

A right lifted Molina's foot off the canvas in the fifth round, but he struck De La Hoya on the break. He managed to hurt De La Hoya with a right hand, as evidenced by an immediate clinch by De La Hoya. The crowd booed the roughhouse tactics, but whether they liked it or not, their hero was in a serious fight. Molina nailed The Golden Boy with a left uppercut in the sixth, and blood trickled from the left nostril of the frustrated De La Hoya, whose offense now was being smothered by Molina.

In the seventh, De La Hoya complained to referee Mills Lane about headbutts, and Molina finally drew a warning. De La Hoya bombed his opponent with a right-left combo on the button—the sort of shots that usually resulted in knockouts—but an energized Molina didn't budge. Molina got extra dirty in the ninth round and starting taunting the younger man, and in the 10th, he tried to lace him and threw more rabbit punches. De La Hoya tried to answer by wrenching Molina's arm in a clinch, but clearly was out of his element.

De La Hoya closed strong in the 12th. A ripping left uppercut-right hand hurt Molina badly. A rigid jab rocked him, too. And after De La Hoya turned a jab into a left uppercut that dinged his chin, Molina was spent and resorted to holding to end the contest. De La Hoya won easily on all three judges' cards (116-111 twice and 117-110), but it wasn't as easy as the scores indicated.

Postscript: After the grueling Molina fight, De La Hoya earned respect from many critics as a real fighter (though plenty of doubters still remained as well, of course). Molina, meanwhile, remained a top contender for several more years, but never won another title after this momentum-halting defeat.

OSCAR DE LA HOYA'S 10 GREATEST FIGHTS

KO 8 Wilfredo Rivera
December 6, 1997, Atlantic City, New Jersey

7

Setting the stage: Rivera, 27-2-1 (18), had gained legitimacy by virtue of a controversial decision loss to then-welterweight champion Pernell Whitaker in April '96. Although he lost the rematch more convincingly, the Puerto Rican had established himself as a player and as a viable opponent for De La Hoya, who was making his fourth appearance at 147 pounds. This was the first fight for De La Hoya since he controversially dismissed trainer Emanuel Steward, who had been at odds with De La Hoya's father, Joel. Veteran Gil Clancy was named to replace Steward and work alongside Robert Alcazar.

What happened: Rivera opened the first round working behind his jab, and De La Hoya was content to counter and score with right hands to the jaw. Rivera achieved moderate success as he continued coming forward, but he took a pair of flush right hands before the round ended.

The pattern continued in the second round, but De La Hoya started to mix in more left hands. He nailed Rivera with a hook midway through, and later countered Rivera's right hand with a hook that buckled his knees. De La Hoya broke out of his counterpunching posture to unleash a flurry, including a right to the chin and a left hook and uppercut that drew blood from Rivera's right eye. De La Hoya then stunned him with a left-right combination, and a final left hand sent Rivera back to his corner with a deep cut on his eyebrow.

De La Hoya began to open up and lead more in the third round, scoring with a hook. De La Hoya clipped Rivera on the bad eye with a lead left hook, but took a stiff jab in return. After a three-punch combination drove Rivera to the ropes, the Puerto Rican switched to a left-handed stance. Realizing that Rivera's offense wasn't nearly as effective when he turned southpaw, De La Hoya began sitting down on his punches. In the fourth, he scored with a hook-right-hook to the head as Rivera failed with his counters. De La Hoya led with another hook that found Rivera and a right hand that had him badly hurt. Another right hand put a bloody Rivera on the canvas, where he remained until the count of six from referee Joe Cortez.

With victory seemingly beyond his reach, the game Rivera tried to press the issue in the fifth. De La Hoya, however, was too quick and adept defensively. The right hand re-emerged for The Golden Boy as he bounced a counter shot over Rivera's jab. A double hook drew more blood from Rivera's gushing wound, and he added some bodywork for good measure. Midway through the sixth, a series of hooks and right hands left Rivera's chest and trunks covered in his own blood. A murderous left hook landed on Rivera's bad eye in the seventh, and a series of jabs off the chin initiated an exchange at ring center that favored the faster De La Hoya.

Rivera turned southpaw again to begin the eighth, but he couldn't stop the right hands. One to the head sent Rivera back to a corner, and a pair of left hooks excited the Convention Center crowd. After a right hand to the rib cage, Cortez broke the action at 2:48 to summon the ring doctor, who determined that Rivera's eye gouge was too deep and dangerous to continue.

Postscript: Although Rivera would go on to have significant fights vs. Shane Mosley and Fernando Vargas (and prove more competitive in both than he was against De La Hoya), he'd never receive another title shot.

De La Hoya rips bloody Rivera with a right

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

6

KO 2 James Leija
December 15, 1995, New York, New York

Setting the stage: Leija was the fourth consecutive opponent for De La Hoya who was either a former or current titleholder. Leija, however, wasn't expected to be that tough of a test despite the former WBC super featherweight king's record of 30-1-2 (14), because the favorite had already defeated the likes of Genaro Hernandez and Rafael Ruelas with relative ease. Still, Leija held a title-winning victory and a draw against eventual Hall of Famer Azumah Nelson, considered one of the sport's most brilliant fighting machines.

Plus, this was De La Hoya's first appearance at Madison Square Garden, and he'd only fought on the East Coast once before—in his sixth professional bout, in Rochester, New York, in 1993. Looking good was crucial to his establishing crossover appeal with a wider, non-Latino audience.

What happened: The size difference was striking as De La Hoya, five inches taller, dispensed with his jab and immediately tried to establish a left hook-right hand combination. Leija was working hard to get inside, but without success. De La Hoya backed him up without throwing a punch and consistently feinted him out of position. A left hook-right hand landed for De La Hoya, who seemed to be enjoying himself as he moved forward, cut off the ring, and initiated exchanges. Though De La Hoya kept trying to set up the hook-right combination, he couldn't quite find his range again in round one. But Leija couldn't make him pay for missing, so De La Hoya continued to march forward.

To start the second, De La Hoya lowered himself as he kept advancing behind feints. Leija, still unable to get off or land a significant punch, got under several punches and the crowd began to boo at the lack of meaningful action.

On cue, De La Hoya trapped his prey perfectly. He feinted a right hand and led with a left hook instead to score a knockdown of his Mexican-American foe. De La Hoya jumped on him at the restart and threw no less than 51 punches. Leija could only duck his head while flailing aimlessly with punches that caught air. De La Hoya hurt him again with a left hand, then followed with a right that sent Leija, now cut above the left eye, back to the canvas in a heap. Leija was able to get up before the bell to end the round, but sensing he was badly hurt and overmatched, referee Ron Lipton halted the contest.

Postscript: De La Hoya never again fought at 135, as he vacated his belt to move up and face Mexican legend Julio Cesar Chavez. Leija later would say of fighting De La Hoya: "I trained for three months for De La Hoya and I worked against bigger sparring partners, welterweights. I was unstoppable, and I would have beaten any other fighter in the world at that class on that night. But De La Hoya blasted me out." The De La Hoya loss would mark a turning point in Leija's career in that he could never get over the hump to win a major fight again. He dropped down five pounds to challenge Nelson for his WBC title in his next outing, and he lost via sixth-round stoppage because of severe cuts over his right eye. He also went on to challenge Shane Mosley for his lightweight title and Kostya Tszyu for the world junior welterweight title, losing both fights, but he nevertheless has remained a sturdy gatekeeper into his late-30s.

Undersized Leija buckles

KO 4 Julio Cesar Chavez
June 7, 1996, Las Vegas, Nevada

5

Setting the stage: This would be the first time De La Hoya didn't enter the ring as the overwhelming fan favorite. On press tours and at Caesars Palace, he was met by more boos than at any time in his career.

Most of the questions about De La Hoya's value as a fighter had been answered. He'd beaten four former titleholders in his last five fights, showing grit in a decision win with brawler John-John Molina, crippling power in second-round knockouts of Rafael Ruelas and James Leija, and technical wizardry in stopping Genaro Hernandez after six. Chavez, however, was a living legend. And unlike the Mexican-American from East Los Angeles, Chavez was a blue-collar "real" Mexican from Culiacan. This challenge for Chavez' WBC super lightweight title would be De La Hoya's second fight at 140 pounds and his first fight with co-trainer Jesus Rivero. Chavez, 97-1-1 (79), had more title fights (31) than De La Hoya had total fights.

What happened: De La Hoya started patiently with singular jabs and an occasional right hand in an effort to just touch his foe. A lead right hand landed on the forehead for De La Hoya, and a series of jabs split open Chavez' left eye just a minute in. Referee Joe Cortez stopped the action to get Chavez' cut—a rip the length of the eyebrow—diagnosed by ringside physician Flip Homansky, who elected to allow the bout to continue. Chavez attacked with passion when the match restarted, but got little done.

De La Hoya's jabs were back in his face in the second. Chavez bobbed and feinted to close the distance, but always found himself out of range. A hard jab reopened the cut, and De La Hoya feinted the jab to the body to score over the top with quick lead rights. Chavez taunted him and tried to mix it up. A glancing left hook from the older man scored and drew chants of "Me-hee-co," but De La Hoya drove a left uppercut to his torso when Chavez tried to smother him.

De La Hoya continued to work behind his jab in the third, and when Chavez got close, he stuck him with another left uppercut to the body to spin out of a would-be clinch. Chavez went to the body, but took a hook to the point of his chin. A combination scored for The Golden Boy as he turned his man again to avoid being bullied inside.

Sensing the end was near, Chavez came out fast in the fourth. He trapped De La Hoya on the ropes and landed a left hook, but ate a counter. Chavez lunged with another hook that energized what had been a subdued crowd, only to be met with fire. A hook clipped Chavez, then De La Hoya drew blood from the nose with a lead right-left uppercut and finished with a right hand. With Chavez wearing a mask of blood, Cortez intervened to get Homansky to check his cut again. This time, the bout was stopped at 2:37.

Postscript: Chavez refused to give credit to De La Hoya. Instead, he said his infant son headbutted him and cut his eye during training camp, claiming that was the real reason he lost. De La Hoya, annoyed at the continuing disrespect, would grant Chavez a rematch two years later that ended with the battered Mexican quitting on his stool after the eighth round.

De La Hoya raps his idol with a jab

4

W 12 Miguel Angel Gonzalez
January 18, 1997, Las Vegas, Nevada

Setting the stage: This would be De La Hoya's first and last defense of the junior welterweight title that he won from Mexican legend Julio Cesar Chavez. A victory all but guaranteed that he would move up to welterweight to face longtime champion and pound-for-pound king Pernell Whitaker before year's end. Gonzalez, 41-0 (32), had made 10 successful defenses of the WBC lightweight title from 1992-'95. De La Hoya was boxing for the second time under the tutelage of defensive master Jesus Rivero, who had trained Hall of Fame flyweight Miguel Canto in the 1970s.

What happened: Slight booing from the crowd greeted the evasive defensive tactics of The Golden Boy, who started on his toes. He stepped in with some shotgun jabs and got under the wide swings of Gonzalez, who was nailed with a left hook at the 40-second mark. De La Hoya fought out of a crouch in the second round and bounced up with his first meaningful right hand, which struck the Mexican flush on the cheek. Fighting in rhythm, De La Hoya dropped his hands and began to potshot. A lead left hook and several jabs scored for him, and then he backed up the Gonzalez with feints before drilling him with a pair of hammering hooks at the bell.

Gonzalez finally got cranking in the third with a hard right hand-left hook. De La Hoya regained control in the fourth as he rammed Gonzalez with five consecutive hard jabs that left a mouse under his right eye. By the fifth, Gonzalez smartly started to throw rights to the ribs underneath De La Hoya's extended left. A glancing right uppercut drove De La Hoya to the ropes, but he exploded with a right hand-left hook that knocked back Gonzalez. De La Hoya reverted to his jab in the sixth, and Gonzalez' only answer was to rabbit punch. A left hook jarred Gonzalez, and a stiff up-jab caught him by surprise.

Gonzalez enjoyed sustained success in the seventh. He slammed a right hand to The Golden Boy's body, and then landed a hard overhand right. Gonzalez then timed De La Hoya with a right uppercut, but lost his momentum when referee Mills Lane took away a point for rabbit punching.

Gonzalez slowed noticeably by the eighth under a storm of flush, powerful jabs. He rebounded to have his best round in the ninth as a welt emerged under De La Hoya's left eye from a lead right hand. De La Hoya's eye became extremely angry looking in the 11th and he took the round off, but Gonzalez lost a point in the 12th for hitting on the break. Hooks and a right hand hurt Gonzalez badly, and he stopped coming forward. The end result was a unanimous decision for De La Hoya, 117-109, 117-111, 117-110.

The left was all De La Hoya needed against Gonzalez

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

While De La Hoya was criticized by some for not being aggressive enough and barely using his right hand, the Gonzalez fight also showcased his boxing skills at their finest. His defense was first-rate, and he'd barely had a nervous moment against an undefeated, highly respected opponent.

Postscript: Sensing a need to get the support of the hardcore Mexican boxing fans, De La Hoya decided it would be wise to stop beating up Mexicans. His next five fights would all be against non-Mexican fighters.

KO 6 Genaro Hernandez
September 9, 1995, Las Vegas, Nevada

3

Setting the stage: This was the third consecutive championship-caliber opponent for De La Hoya during his extraordinary 1995 campaign. Hernandez was not only undefeated at 32-0-1 (16), but, like Rafael Ruelas immediately before him, was a Mexican-American harboring bitterness toward The Golden Boy. Hernandez called De La Hoya a "fake" and nothing more than an amateurish shoeshine puncher.

At 5'11", Hernandez was big for a lightweight. He also had eight years more experience as a professional than De La Hoya, his cross-town Los Angeles rival.

What happened: Hernandez was patient and smooth as he cut off the ring to put pressure on the fast-moving De La Hoya, who seemed to be thrown off by the southpaw's conventional stance at Caesars Palace. They traded jabs, with Hernandez getting the best of it. He jabbed De La Hoya well to start the second round, too, and a right to the body knocked De La Hoya into the ropes. Although most of Hernandez' jabs had fallen short of their mark, he succeeded in controlling the distance to neutralize the faster, more athletically gifted De La Hoya with it. A strong right hand from De La Hoya landed high on the head, and a short hook and left uppercut caught Hernandez as the fighters exchanged for the first time. "Chicanito" responded with a counter right hand over De La Hoya's jab, but Hernandez' nose began to bleed from an abrasion on the bridge.

Hernandez backed De La Hoya up with a jab in the third and scored with a long right. De La Hoya, however, started to emerge from his shell. Just as he touched Hernandez with a few jabs, a stinging right hand caught the wily veteran. A hard right to the body froze Hernandez on the ropes, and during a furious flurry, a pair of left uppercuts scored cleanly. Hernandez jumped right on top of Oscar to start the fourth, but De La Hoya got low, feinted a jab to the body, and jolted Hernandez with a right uppercut. Chicanito stumbled backward as De La Hoya landed three consecutive hooks to the body, and for the first time, De La Hoya was consistently backing him up. A good right hand from De La Hoya scored, and Hernandez was reduced to just grinning in return.

The fifth round was more tactical. Hernandez landed a few lead rights as De La Hoya regrouped to gauge his distance. In the sixth, Hernandez was on top of De La Hoya with a hook, but the younger man was up to the task. Hernandez landed a good right to the body and a left to the head, but De La Hoya, with his back to the ropes, unloaded three consecutive left uppercuts that made Hernandez' nose bleed. Clinches ensued, with Hernandez doing his best to avoid having any punches thrown at him. A feint set up a left hook for De La Hoya, and he clipped Hernandez at the end of the round to leave him drenched in crimson. Without consulting his corner, Hernandez walked over to referee Richard Steele to call off the fight because he suspected he had a severely broken nose.

Postscript: Though called a quitter by some, Hernandez did the smart thing, according to doctors who observed him after the fight. His nose was broken in multiple places, making it nearly inconceivable that he could have been competitive any longer.

De La Hoya wings a hook at "Chicanito"

2

KO 2 Rafael Ruelas
May 6, 1995, Las Vegas, Nevada

Setting the stage: Too much too soon? Ruelas was the most serious threat of De La Hoya's young career, a titlist who packed a punch. And given the questions about De La Hoya's chin and how easily he was rattled by the rugged John-John Molina in his last outing, speculation abounded that if Ruelas—who had 12 first-round knockouts to his credit—could get to him first, it would be an early exit.

De La Hoya was fighting for the first major title of his career, the IBF lightweight belt. Ruelas, a fellow southern Californian who had twice as much pro experience and was making his third defense, beat Freddie Pendleton for the title the year before, and was an inch taller than De La Hoya at 5'11". At 43-1 (34), Ruelas' only loss came in 1991 vs. Mauro Gutierrez, when, after being knocked down in the second round, he had a miscommunication with his corner that resulted in him failing to beat the count.

De La Hoya and Ruelas had one common opponent in Narciso Valenzuela. Ruelas won a 10-round decision; De La Hoya knocked him out in one round, but was knocked down in the process.

What happened: Ruelas pressured recklessly, walking into jabs and getting sized up with one-two combinations. De La Hoya was content to touch and go as he refused to remain stationary to engage. The result was that Ruelas couldn't let go with his own punches, and when he did, he was wide as he awkwardly stumbled over himself.

A lot of De La Hoya's punches glanced off a high guard as Ruelas kept both gloves over his ears like muffs. A right hand and a jab landed for De La Hoya, and a straight right-left hook rattled Ruelas. Another right-left penetrated the guard as De La Hoya moved at will and fought at his own leisure. When in close, De La Hoya thwarted Ruelas' aggression with simple pushes and shoves that sent the off-balance aggressor further off-kilter. Ruelas threw a rabbit punch and hit on the break, so De La Hoya stayed low to finish the round and flexed his pectorals in a mocking gesture. Trainer Robert Alcazar rushed the ring to complain to referee Richard Steele about the fouling, which led Joe Goossen, Ruelas' trainer, to do the same.

Ruelas came out throwing hooks in the second, but De La Hoya wasn't there to be found. The defending titlist missed with a left uppercut that caused him to trip over himself yet again. De La Hoya's jab wouldn't allow Ruelas to get set, but after moving efficiently, the challenger elected to stop and trade inside. He bumped off Ruelas with his left shoulder to create his distance and shot a right uppercut that missed narrowly. However, a left hook followed that landed flush on the chin, sending Ruelas to the canvas. Steele gave him an eight count, but Ruelas was unsteady on his feet. De La Hoya attacked again with rapid-fire shots, and all Ruelas could do was cover up as he went to the ropes. Refusing to hold to clear his head, a pair of lefts pierced his guard before Steele stopped the rout at 1:43.

The dangerous Ruelas drops in the second

Postscript: Although only his second loss, this fight ended Ruelas' run as a championship-caliber fighter. He lost to relative unknown George Scott in his next bout. De La Hoya crossed over from a ticket-selling prospect to a pay-per-view-selling superstar.

KO 11 Fernando Vargas
September 14, 2002, Las Vegas, Nevada

1

Setting the stage: The event's billing, "Bad Blood," said it all. Vargas, covering himself in the Mexican flag and calling himself a "real" Mexican, claimed De La Hoya dissed him years ago when he was an amateur coming up and looking to him for guidance. De La Hoya said such a story was only a figment of Vargas' imagination. Who knows. The battle lines between the two Mexican-American fighters from the Los Angeles area were drawn.

Also drawn were *oohs* and *aahs* for WBA 154-pound titleholder Vargas' unusually chiseled physique at the weigh-in. De La Hoya, who'd won the WBC strap from Javier Castillejo 15 months prior, was making just his second appearance at 154 pounds, a division Vargas, 22-1 (20), had occupied since turning pro in 1997. This hotly anticipated fight was for the vacant RING championship in the division.

What happened: De La Hoya opened fast to establish his jab and combinations to the body, and he nailed Vargas with a lead right hand and a left hook. His boxing ability clearly was causing difficulty. In the last minute of the first round, however, Vargas trapped him on the ropes, almost knocking De La Hoya between the second and third strands. Vargas then marked up De La Hoya's right cheekbone with a pair of clubbing left hands to steal the round and electrify Mandalay Bay.

De La Hoya's jab stabbed Vargas five consecutive times in the second, and a searing right hand caught him flush to punctuate his dominance. In the third, Vargas exploded with a right to the head and a left hook to the jaw that rattled De La Hoya, but The Golden Boy controlled most of the fourth with a jab that caused swelling under Vargas' right eye.

Vargas was more assertive in the fifth, and it paid dividends. He connected with a three-punch flurry early, then tagged De La Hoya with a right hand-left hook that drew blood from his nose. Then a right hand to the head froze Oscar. By the sixth, however, De La Hoya was back boxing behind a jab that thwarted Vargas' momentum. A pair of left hands opened a nasty cut under Vargas' right eye that began to pour, and come the seventh round, Vargas was noticeably out of gas.

Vargas appeared to have regained some of his footing by the 10th and was winning the round until De La Hoya wobbled him badly with a three-punch combination with just seconds remaining. Looking both exhausted and hurt at the start of the 11th, Vargas lost his form as he leaned in to land a bodyshot. The result was a left hook to the jaw that put Vargas flat on his back. He rose at the count of five, but he was finished. De La Hoya jammed him with a right hand to the pit of the stomach, and a non-stop combination of straight punches left him limp on the ropes as referee Joe Cortez stopped the contest 48 seconds into the round. It was De La Hoya's first knockout win in a true superfight since his junior welterweight days.

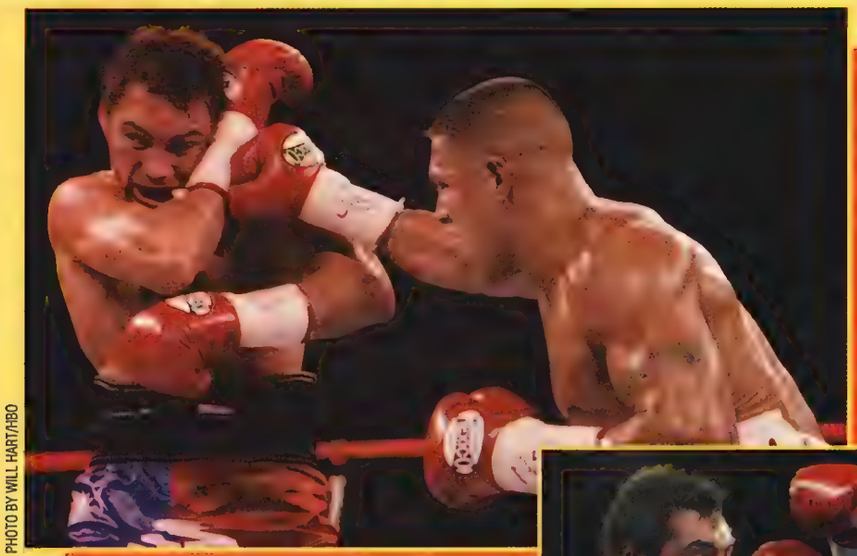
Postscript: Renowned conditioning coach John Philbin, who was given all the credit for Vargas' magnificent body, announced at the postfight conference that he would not work with the fighter anymore. After calling Philbin a "coward" in a conference call days later, Vargas tested positive for the steroid stanozolol and was suspended by the Nevada commission for nine months. On vacation in Hawaii when he learned of the result, Vargas claimed he had no knowledge that he was taking a banned substance and that his nutritionist, Mazan Ali, who clashed with Philbin repeatedly during camp, had misled him. ■

Johnnie Whitehead is an editor at USA Today and a regular contributor to this magazine.

Vargas gets rocked by a right hand

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

OSCAR DE LA HOYA'S GREATEST FIGHT



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BERNARD HOPKINS' 10 GREATEST FIGHTS

10

W 12 Andrew Council
November 18, 1997, Upper Marlboro, Maryland

By Johnnie Whitehead

Setting the stage: For his sixth defense of the IBF belt, Hopkins was on enemy turf, just outside Council's hometown of Washington, D.C., at Show Place Arena. In addition to the unfriendly environment, the fight was scored by three judges from the D.C. metro area. Hopkins, who had scored five knockouts in his previous five defenses, had plenty of motivation to make it six for this *Tuesday Night Fights* main event on USA Network.

The chiseled, 5'9" Council, 27-5-3 (19) going in, called Hopkins "one-dimensional" and, like many challengers before him, expected Hopkins to tire down the stretch after a fast start. Hopkins, on the other hand, was intent on showing he was a complete boxer, not a crude street-fighting knockout machine.

What happened: Council tried to feint Hopkins out of position, but took the only clean punch in the first exchange—a left hook. Hopkins cut off the ring and backed up Council, scoring with a long right hand to the body and a left hook. Hopkins cuffed Council behind the head with his left hand, turned him, and hit with the right hand. Then a right and left uppercut scored on Council's navel before the bell.

In the second, Hopkins was in his challenger's face, scoring with both hands, especially to the sides. But Council threw a right hand on the break as both fighters were warned for rough stuff by referee Kenny Chevalier. Hopkins held with the left hand again inside, but this time Council landed a flurry of bodyshots inside. Hopkins drove him back into a corner and unloaded, but Council scored flush with a counter left hook.

Council's best round was the third. He did better defensively, but took a right-hand potshot from Hopkins off the ropes. A left uppercut found its mark on Hopkins' chin, and a furious trade at the bell saw Council get the upper hand as he crushed Hopkins on the top of the head with a right hand, his best punch of the fight.

Hopkins regained control in the fourth. After Council shoeshined Hopkins with a combination below the belt, he retaliated by clipping Council with a right uppercut at the bell.

Council attempted to walk Hopkins down in the fifth, but was met with right hands that extinguished his aggression. Later in the round, a cut under Council's left eyebrow caused a momentary stoppage, as the wound was examined by the ringside physician.

Hopkins, boxing with his back to the ropes, softened up Council with a hard right hand. Then in the sixth, coming up from a crouch, Hopkins tagged Council with an overhand right that sent him reeling from ring center all the way to a corner. Chevalier compounded Council's predicament by deducting a point for holding and hitting.

Just 30 seconds into the seventh round, Council was felled with a right uppercut to the body, but Chevalier ruled it a low blow and then deducted a point from Hopkins. Unconcerned, Hopkins plowed forward, overcoming a hard low blow in the ninth, as he broke down Council to win the remaining rounds in similar, dominating fashion. Council's only achievement on this night would be that he never touched the canvas officially despite taking a serious pounding. The scores of 118-106 (twice) and 119-105 were all in Hopkins' favor.

Council covers up as Hopkins attacks

Postscript: Council would unsuccessfully challenge Keith Holmes for the WBC version of the middleweight title in 1999, losing another 12-round decision. He quit after that, but returned to action in 2003, and is 1-1 on his latest comeback.

9

W 12 Keith Holmes
April 14, 2001, New York, New York

Setting the stage: The first of three bouts in Don King's Middleweight Championship Series took place in The Theater at Madison Square Garden. Though plenty of hostile words were swapped between the fighters on the press tour—they condescendingly referred to one another as "brother" and questioned one another's intellect and social consciousness—not much was expected from this matchup in terms of excitement.

IBF titleholder Hopkins said he didn't deserve to be in the tournament if he didn't knock out Holmes. Still, Holmes, in his second reign as the WBC beltholder, posed some stylistic problems because he was a 6'2" southpaw counterpuncher with good power and a 35-2 (23) record.

What happened: It didn't start out as a pleasing display. Holmes wasn't confident enough to shoot his jab with authority, and Hopkins, trying to make the natural counterpuncher take the lead, wasn't willing to commit, either. Before the third, Holmes' corner demanded that he step behind his jab to seize the initiative. That's when Hopkins took over.

Circling to his right, and into Holmes' power hand, Hopkins led with right hands and also scored well with a jab. The Executioner then became the aggressor and scored a chopping right hand and left hook, as well as landing a few punches on Holmes' high-riding protective cup. Hopkins waded inside again with a right to the body that missed, but shifted his leverage into a double left hook that scored as his shorter, crisper punches dominated the exchanges in close.

Holmes was instructed to work Hopkins' body inside in the fourth, but Hopkins was on his chest from the start and winning the inside battle. Even when Hopkins missed from the outside, he'd close the distance to neutralize Holmes' power and punish his body. Some of Hopkins' bodyshots strayed below the belt, and referee Steve Smoger warned him for hitting low.

Holmes landed his best punches in the fifth round, a hard right hook-left hand combination to the body. But he got punished in return, including several punches to the hips that led referee Steve Smoger to take a point from Hopkins.

In the sixth, Smoger warned Holmes for excessive holding, but the befuddled titleholder had no other answer since he was being bested from every angle. Hopkins defiantly moved into the southpaw's wheelhouse, going in and out as he pleased without paying a price, and backing Holmes up with feints. Holmes finally mustered the courage to toss a jab, but Hopkins flurried to the beltline with three bodyshots and scored over the top with a left hook.

Sensing he was hopelessly behind on the cards, Holmes came out strong in the eighth, but missed with a right uppercut and took a right hand to the head for the error. Holmes started the ninth by looping a left hand, but Hopkins caught it on his glove and answered the challenge by jumping in with a right hand followed by a hard left to Holmes' body. A right hand staggered Holmes, and Hopkins moved inside to carve up his midsection.

The arcing left hand finally scored for Holmes in the 10th, but it did little for his cause, and he was flogged yet again. A counter right hand-left hook to the head wobbled Holmes in the 11th, and he held on to survive. A 12th-round left hook buckled him, too, but Holmes managed to hear the final bell and the announcement that Hopkins had won a unanimous decision by tallies of 117-110, 118-109, and 119-108.

Postscript: Hopkins' methodical but emphatic victory put him in the finals against Trinidad, while Holmes didn't fight again for more than two years.

Holmes and Hopkins put their belts on the line in King's tourney

8

W 12 William Joppy
December 13, 2003, Atlantic City, New Jersey

Setting the stage: Few thought former titleholder Joppy had a chance of winning, but he would complete the cycle for Hopkins, who'd already beaten every other significant claimant to the throne in his era entering his 17th defense.

Joppy, agitated at Hopkins for interrupting his turn at the podium during a prefight press conference, shoved the champion with both hands and almost started a brawl. The altercation led to a bet between the two that stipulated Joppy would get $50,000 if he heard the final bell. If Hopkins were to stop him, Joppy would owe him $25,000. Joppy was 34-2-1 (25) going in.

What happened: It wasn't Hopkins' most aesthetically pleasing outing, but it sure was effective.

Joppy matched the champ's aggression early, trading rabbit punches, roughhousing in the clinches, and hitting on the break. Hopkins cornered Joppy on the ropes early in the third and scored with a pair of right uppercuts and a left hook to the body. It was a portent of things to come, as a searing left hook to the body, just under Joppy's right elbow, would prove to be Hopkins' most effective punch of the fight. Later in the third, Joppy retaliated in kind after being hit low, but was caught by referee Earl Morton, who gave Hopkins a timeout to recover and issued Joppy a warning.

The next few rounds were marred by mauling, clinching, and low blows, but Hopkins managed to smother Joppy's jab and scored the most effective blows with a pair of sweeping overhand rights.

Hopkins pinned Joppy on the ropes in the sixth and reeled off 10 unanswered punches, and then reverted to using his head as a weapon while bullying his opponent.

Joppy tried to assert himself in the seventh to no avail. A hard overhand right scored for Hopkins, who stayed in the pocket and flurried with short, compact punches while using his shoulders to ward off incoming blows.

By the eighth, all of the holding was initiated by Joppy, who began to look more often to Morton for respite. Hopkins began to toy with his foe, dropping his lead hand to his thigh as he stalked Joppy and made him flinch without throwing a punch. A sustained attack with uppercuts forced Joppy to get on his toes, and by the ninth he was in survival mode.

A lead left hook in the 10th hurt Joppy badly for the first time, and he was dazed again from a lead right hand as Hopkins fought diligently to extricate himself from a clinch. Sensing that he had to respond to avoid getting stopped, Joppy attempted to attack the body, but he took a right hand instead.

The right side of Joppy's face was grotesquely swollen from the temple down the jaw line, and he appeared ready to go in the 11th. Hopkins trapped him on the ropes, scoring with both hands via uppercuts, but couldn't finish his brave challenger.

Joppy walked into a lead left hook to commence the 12th, and a right hand-left hook salvo shook him to his boots. Hopkins turned his jab over and into a hook to knock Joppy into the ropes, and while he held, the champion punched rapidly in hopes of ending matters. Hopkins came close, but had to settle for a unanimous decision by scores of 119-109, 118-109, and 119-108.

Postscript: Joppy won the $50,000 bet with Hopkins, but soon encountered a host of legal problems, which, coupled with the sound beating he received from Hopkins, will probably keep him from returning to the ring anytime soon.

Joppy absorbs a right from Hopkins

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

KO 4 Joe Lipsey
March 16, 1996, Las Vegas, Nevada

7

Setting the stage: Hopkins was making his second title defense; the first was a cheap, two-punch, 24-second knockout of Steve Frank two months prior (the fastest ever in middleweight title fight history; Frank had taken the fight on seven days notice). So this was expected to be the first real action for Hopkins since winning the title against Segundo Mercado in April '95. More importantly, the afternoon bout was televised live on ABC's *Wide World Of Sports* as part of a big boxing weekend. That night, Mike Tyson would regain the WBC heavyweight belt from Frank Bruno.

Lipsey, a 5'9" muscular southpaw, was on a four-fight knockout streak en route to his first title shot. Despite his impressive 25-0 (20) record leading up to Hopkins, Lipsey hadn't fought a significant opponent in his protected professional upbringing. In fact, his last bout before Hopkins was a third-round knockout of James Gatlin, who at the time was 9-13 (5) and had been knocked out four times. Still, many were unsure what to expect from the unknown challenger with the look and record of a future champion, or the champion, who had yet to solidify his identity in the ring.

What happened: In what would become standard in Hopkins' method of operation, he felt out Lipsey with a few lead right hands to take the first round. Hopkins gauged his distance, surveyed the velocity of the incoming fire, and monitored his own timing. The defending titleholder then computed it all in his magnificent pugilistic brain, and with the start of the second, he commenced cutting off the ring and gradually inching closer and closer to Lipsey.

In the ensuing round, Hopkins landed chopping right hands inside and ran afoul of the rules by hitting on the break. Hopkins' right eye began to swell badly from a clash of heads, but it didn't prove to be a factor. By round's end, Lipsey was woozy from a right hand, and a left had him visibly shaken, as his problems kept snowballing.

Lipsey tried his best to stem the onslaught by landing a good left hand to start the third, but Hopkins nailed him with a right in return. Southpaw Lipsey responded with a right hook and began winging punches in a desperate effort to survive, but in the process he spent himself and he ate another solid right from Hopkins.

A short right uppercut inside came next, as the champion began timing Lipsey's lunges, and a series of one-two combinations followed. When Lipsey tried to fight at closer quarters, Hopkins didn't neglect the body and leaned frequently on the challenger's neck to increase his fatigue. The only question that remained wasn't who'd win, but how much longer Lipsey could survive.

Hopkins jumped in with a lead right to start the fourth, and a frustrated Lipsey became an even more inviting target. Though battered, Lipsey showed he was a semi-live dog by forcefully wrestling out of a clinch. But after chasing so recklessly, the bite was soon knocked out of his bark.

A right hand from Hopkins staggered him, and as Lipsey led with a left hand, he squared his shoulders and stepped on a landmine. Hopkins met his chin with a right uppercut that left Lipsey straight-legged at ring center as his mouthpiece darted out. A pair of straight right hands sent him crashing to the canvas as referee Mitch Halpern fell with Lipsey in an attempt to stop the fight with less than 10 seconds to go in the round. A count wasn't necessary.

Postscript: The knockout remains one of the most spectacular of The Executioner's career. Lipsey never fought again.

Hopkins celebrates as the ref aids Lipsey

6

KO 7 Robert Allen
February 6, 1999, Washington, D.C.

Setting the stage: Their first bout, the previous August, ended in a no-contest when Hopkins, being extricated from one of many foul-filled clinches, was inadvertently pushed out of the ring by referee Mills Lane. He landed on the floor of the Las Vegas Hilton, injured his ankle, and was unable to continue.

That was bad news for Allen, 23-2 (18) with 1 no-contest, who appeared to have flustered Hopkins by besting him at his own roughhouse game. The ex-Marine accused the champion of bailing out by exaggerating his injury. An immediate rematch was in order as Allen's prefight bravado convinced some that Hopkins had finally met his match.

What happened: Allen talked the talk leading up to the rematch, but couldn't walk it. Instead, he got walked over. Hopkins dinged him with a right hand on the chin to open the fight and then threw wicked bodyshots inside as Allen loaded up.

Hopkins did a good job of timing the southpaw as Allen jumped in with a right hook, and then caught him with a counter right hand early in round two that put the challenger on the canvas. The Executioner tried to finish him, but his momentum was slowed when both fighters punched on the break, leading referee Rudy Battle to warn Allen.

Allen tried to establish his jab in the third, but Hopkins got underneath and countered him hard to the body. A right hand to the jaw and a series of follow-up punches left Allen shaky at round's end.

In the fourth, when victory appeared unattainable for Allen, he tried to take advantage of Hopkins' bad sportsmanship by flopping from a shot south of the border. Battle gave Allen up to five minutes to rest, but he only was met with right hands at the restart, including another shot below the beltline.

Shortly after that infraction, as they wrestled in yet another clinch, Hopkins tapped Allen with a right hand on the thigh. Allen swooned again, and although Battle deducted a point from Hopkins, he wasn't buying the theatrics. He ordered Allen to get up.

Allen fouled in the next clinch, but with less than 10 seconds left in the round, he walked into a left hook to the jaw that buckled his knees. He held on until the bell, and as the fighters were separated by Battle, Allen took another spill, claiming he was fouled, although no punch was thrown.

Allen found the mark with a left hook in the sixth, but Hopkins' right hand was working overtime. With his lead foot inside of Allen's, the orthodox champion couldn't miss, and he wobbled Allen again. Allen caught Hopkins with a right hook, but right-hand slugs to the chest thwarted his momentum. Allen's hook found a home again, but the sustained body attack of Hopkins had beaten most of the fire out of him.

A series of left hooks to the body and a right hand over the top jolted Allen, and he fell to the canvas. He regained his footing and made it to the seventh, where the torture would end.

Hopkins cracked his jaw with a right hand, and then a whip-like bodyshot folded Allen into the ropes. The assault persisted, and when the weary and battered Allen failed to return fire, Battle stopped the contest at 1:18.

Postscript: Hopkins was typically angry at his purse for the bout ($225,000), calling it "a disgrace."

Allen would lose his next fight by knockout, too, but eventually rebound to embark on a lengthy win streak to re-establish himself as a contender. He challenged Hopkins again in June '04, only to lose a unanimous 12-round decision.

"The Executioner" leaves Allen helpless

W 12 Antwun Echols
December 12, 1999, Miami, Florida

5

Setting the stage: At the time, Echols, 22-2-1 (22), was just another relative unknown with an impressive knockout record against B- and C-level opposition. And because such fighters never have fared well against Hopkins, there was no reason to suspect the native of Davenport, Iowa, would be that serious of a threat to the long-reigning champion, who was making his 10th defense, on Fox Sports Net.

Though not a major marquee match by any standards, the fact that fewer than 1,000 fans showed up at Miccosukee Indian Gaming, a glorified bingo hall on the outskirts of Miami, spoke volumes about how little fanfare accompanied this bout.

What happened: Echols established his considerable physical strength from the outset. "Kid Dynamite" pinned Hopkins on the ropes and scored with a good right hand in the first round. They traded on even terms inside, but ignoring referee Frank Santore's call for a break, Echols sent the champion sprawling to the canvas when he landed a right hand on the button. It wasn't an official knockdown, and Hopkins was given time to recover. Following a brief timeout, Echols, sensing his advantage, attacked and landed a couple of solid left hooks.

Hopkins showed a lot of movement to start the second, making Echols look awkward at times as the challenger loaded up, but couldn't pull the trigger. Even though Echols was taking the fight to Hopkins, he walked into right hands from every angle.

Echols maintained his posture in the third and connected with a right hand, but Hopkins' short left hooks and uppercuts to the body inside did the most damage. Hopkins fought well off the ropes in the fourth, and the tone changed in the fifth with Hopkins countering effectively. A flush right hand knocked back Echols' head, and Hopkins followed up with another flush right. Echols, however, kept coming forward and throwing until a right hand-left hook from Hopkins rocked him and stalled his assault.

Hopkins was doing textbook work in the seventh until a right hand met him coming out of a crouch. They traded solid right hands to begin the eighth, and then Santore jumped in to sternly warn Hopkins for holding behind the head and hitting.

A right hand from Hopkins picked Echols' left foot off the canvas in the ninth, and the challenger struggled to right himself on weakened legs. Hopkins sat down on his punches in the 10th and backed up Echols, but a right hand from Echols convinced him to get back on his bike for the remainder of the round.

Echols was brave but beaten by the start of the 11th. Hopkins' crisp, accurate punches had taken their toll. He walked Echols down in the 12th and lifted his left leg off the canvas again with a right hand to the head. Echols, despite tossing some haymaker rights, appeared physically spent as he flailed with his punches. But just as Hopkins began popping him with right hands, Echols delivered a whistling right hand with 55 seconds remaining, and Hopkins legs buckled so badly that his knees almost touched the floor.

Hopkins soon recovered, but backed off for the remainder of the round and coasted home to a unanimous decision by scores of 118-110 (twice) and 119-109.

Postscript: Hopkins, who was grossly underpaid for this bout ($100,000), would soon end his icy relationship with America Presents, and his rematch with Echols a year later on HBO was for significantly more money.

Echols (above) gave Hopkins a tough battle for the IBF belt

4

KO 11 Glencoffe Johnson
July 20, 1997, Indio, California

Setting the stage: Ah, network TV. But sadly, this would be CBS' last fight of its boxing series. Hopkins, making his fifth defense of the IBF title, was up against the previously unbeaten Johnson, a U.S.-based Jamaican who entered the ring with a glossy 32-0 (22) record.

What happened: Showing respect for Johnson early, Hopkins came out with his guard high, boxing behind a long jab. The Executioner pounded Johnson with jabs and picked his spots to turn up the pressure in the second round. A left uppercut stunned Johnson, but Hopkins' follow-up assault only caught gloves.

Johnson's corner tried to convince him before the third that the worst was over and that he'd soon wrest control of the tempo from Hopkins. But if they figured their charge was in better condition and would wear down the titleholder, were they ever wrong. Hopkins backed up Johnson to start the third stanza, snapping his head with a few jabs before scoring with a right hand. A right uppercut sent Johnson in reverse, and Hopkins' body assault began to take shape. Johnson offered little offense, and Hopkins tested the waters with uppercuts that narrowly missed their mark.

In the fourth, Hopkins battered Johnson's body as they stood and traded. A right uppercut missed Johnson again, but Hopkins was now fighting more on the inside and pushing back his challenger with chopping rights.

In the fifth, a right-hand lead to the chin and a pair of lefts to the body hurt Johnson, who stayed in a shell, unable to fire back. Hopkins turned up the pressure another notch, landed a right on the inside, and then swarmed forward to do more damage. He finally got his range with a left uppercut that caught Johnson, and a right and another left uppercut followed as Johnson struggled to stay upright at the bell.

Johnson came out more aggressively in the sixth, but Hopkins steadied himself behind a laser-sharp jab. A lead right hand to the head and a right underneath to Johnson's body scored cleanly, as Hopkins lowered his left hand and began to potshot the challenger. Hopkins rode with a right hand in the seventh, and returned fire with short, compact shots inside to deter Johnson, whose right eye began to swell shut.

The Executioner sat down on his punches to start the eighth, and caught his wilted foe with a good left hook inside. He pinned Johnson on the ropes and made him wince from a left hook to the ribcage. After landing a few more rights in the ninth, Hopkins froze Johnson with a hook to the body and followed with a series of right hands from all angles that left Johnson on the verge of going down.

Johnson gets taken to school on the inside

Referee Pat Russell threatened to stop the fight before the 10th started if Johnson didn't show more offense. Johnson was a determined but beaten man, and he took a merciless left hook battering to the body. Hopkins flurried one final time, buckling Johnson with a right uppercut and prompting Russell to step in to stop the contest at 1:23 of the 11th.

Postscript: Though a clear-cut victor, Hopkins contended, "Glen Johnson was a tough guy. He came in shape. If I had laxed up one minute in my training and my discipline, he'd be champion today." Johnson, who was reduced to tears from the disappointment, would lose his next two fights and then lose four in a row from 1999-2000. He would, nonetheless, bounce back to win the IBF light heavyweight belt in 2004. To date, Hopkins is the only opponent to have stopped him.

KO 7 Segundo Mercado
April 29, 1995, Landover, Maryland

3

Setting the stage: This was more of an even playing field. In their first encounter, December 17 of the previous year in Quito, Ecuador, Hopkins, who had little time to prepare to fight in a city 9,350 feet above sea level, had to settle for a draw in a bout for the vacant IBF 160-pound title.

Hopkins was floored in the fifth by a pair of right hands and again with a right uppercut in the seventh, forcing him to hold on in order to survive the last 20 seconds of the round. Despite his superb conditioning, Hopkins was out of gas by the eighth round, but he found his second wind in the 11th and mugged Mercado, pounding his lengthy 6'2" torso down the stretch.

Even though it was officially a stalemate, if knockdowns of the Ecuadorian had been correctly called in the third and sixth rounds, Hopkins would have been victorious. Colombian judge Francisco Hernandez scored four even rounds, including the one-sided 12th in which one judge scored 10-8 for Hopkins (Hernandez had it 116-114 for Mercado). Still, despite any favoritism shown Mercado by local officials, it was close enough to warrant a rematch, especially as the IBF title was still vacant. Coming into the rematch, Mercado was 18-2-1 (11).

What happened: Against any other middleweight on that night, Mercado might have been victorious. He didn't scatter or clinch to thwart Hopkins' early aggression. He met it head-on and landed the harder shots inside of Hopkins' more voluminous flurries. To Hopkins' credit, he was undeterred.

Hopkins stayed in Mercado's chest, and just when it looked as if Hopkins was winning the battle but losing the war, he broke through in the third round when he froze Mercado with a left hook and staggered him with a right hand. Both were followed by low blows from Mercado, who repeatedly hit his opponent with illegal shots when referee Rudy Battle was out of position.

Even so, Hopkins never lost his composure. Using his momentum to manufacture power, Hopkins was not only punching more effectively, but also getting under Mercado's counters as he sent his foe back to his corner on rubber legs at the end of the third.

Hopkins walked down his man in the fourth, and clearly showed he was the fresher of the two combatants. A lead right knocked Mercado loopy, and a hook staggered him again. From that point on, Mercado appeared to concede he couldn't keep pace and was reduced to trying to time Hopkins' rushes.

Hopkins' pinpoint accuracy, however, would be too much to overcome. By the fifth round he was teeing off on Mercado. A one-two over the ear sent Mercado into the ropes, and Hopkins kept him pinned there as he broke him down to the body, some punches legal and others on or below the beltline.

A lead right hand snapped back Mercado's head in the seventh, and then a counter right over a lazy jab sent him reeling to the ropes, which kept him upright. Hopkins pummeled his body until Battle, after breaking the action, looked into Mercado's eyes and surveyed his body language before stopping the contest.

The victory gave Hopkins the IBF middleweight belt vacated by Roy Jones, who had bested him for it two years prior.

Postscript: The Mercado victory sparked Hopkins' tear through the middleweight division. Although never considered a one-punch knockout artist, he scored five knockouts in his first five title defenses.

Mercado never was the same after taking such a savage beating. He posted a 10-round points victory against .500 fighter Charlie Smith a year later before being kayoed in seven of his next eight bouts.

Hopkins rips into Mercado en route to IBF title

PHOTO BY WILL HART/SHOWTIME

BERNARD HOPKINS' 10 GREATEST FIGHTS

2

KO 10 Antwun Echols
December 1, 2000, Las Vegas, Nevada

Setting the stage: In their first clash, Hopkins escaped with a unanimous 12-round decision for his 10th successful defense. But he had to weather an early scare when the heavy-handed, naturally stronger Echols, who nailed him with a right hand during a break, hurt him. It was the most suspense Hopkins had faced in his lengthy title reign, but the bout took place with little fanfare. The rematch would receive much greater exposure before a full house at the Venetian on HBO, the night before Felix Trinidad would meet Fernando Vargas for the junior middleweight championship.

There was bad blood between Hopkins and Echols, thanks to the rough nature of their December 1999 bout. Echols entered the rematch 24-3-1 (23), which included two wins since his first title challenge.

What happened: Even though it ended in a decisive victory for the champ, this was a physically demanding tussle. The Executioner set the tone quickly, charging Echols and locking his right glove under his own armpit with his left hand, while simultaneously punching with his right underneath. Referee Tony Weeks had to move out of position to break the hold.

A frustrated Echols clipped the champion with a right hand, and a furious pace ensued with Hopkins getting the better of it as he forced Echols to expend a lot of energy.

Hopkins landed a blatant punch to the back of the head in the second. Though Echols flopped like a fish on a dock, no five-minute rest was given nor was a point taken. The tempo increased as Echols loaded up, only to catch air. Hopkins gave him angles and jabbed him senseless.

In the fourth, Hopkins spun Echols and clipped his defenseless foe with a left hook. A jab-right hand scored flush as Echols chose to complain to Weeks rather than defend himself. He stalked Hopkins in the fifth, but couldn't avoid the lead right hands that caused bad swelling over Echols' left eye in the later rounds.

The frustrations came to a head in the sixth when Echols, who was under heavy attack, dipped, grabbed Hopkins around the legs, picked him up, and drove him shoulder-first into the canvas. Weeks took two points for a flagrant foul, but Hopkins, feeling the effects of the fall (it was later found that he suffered a separated shoulder), failed to throw another right hand for the final 2:33 of the round.

Hopkins was dancing again in the seventh, and rocked Echols with a right-left-right combination. Hopkins followed with a flurry in which CompuBox said he landed 22 of 25 powershots. Finally, a short right-left hook knocked Echols through the ropes for an eight count.

A point was deducted from Hopkins for holding and hitting in the eighth, but it was academic. He buzzed Echols with a right to the temple to start the 10th. Later in the round, a right to the body crumpled Echols into the ropes, and Hopkins erupted with a sustained flurry that forced Weeks to intervene at 1:42. Echols was defenseless, but still on his feet when it ended.

Hopkins has Echols under serious pressure in rematch

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Postscript: When Hopkins' much talked-about catchweight rematch with Roy Jones turned out to be nothing but hot air, he focused his sights on Trinidad. Around that time, Don King was putting the finishing touches on Trinidad's ascent to the 160-pound class by matching him against WBA titleholder William Joppy. But pressure from the public and media dictated that if Trinidad wanted to be the genuine middleweight champion, he'd have to eventually beat Hopkins, which ultimately gave birth to King's Middleweight World Championship Series.

Echols, bitter in defeat and frustrated with the outcome, moved up to 168 pounds, where he has campaigned with mixed success.

BERNARD HOPKINS' 10 GREATEST FIGHTS

KO 12 Felix Trinidad
September 29, 2001, New York, New York

1

Setting the stage: The lead-up to this, the final bout in Don King's Middleweight World Championship Series, was pure chaos. First, the Philadelphia tough guy equated his bout with Trinidad, a Latino with distinct African bloodlines, with a "race war." He continued to agitate by tossing the Puerto Rican flag at a New York press conference. Then, while on the San Juan leg of the press tour, Hopkins hurled the flag to the ground again and made disparaging remarks and gestures to 10,000 angry locals. Soon after, he was chased out of Roberto Clemente Stadium by a mob that broke through a police barricade throwing rocks, bottles, and chairs.

Adding to the subplots was the September 11 terrorist attack on New York City. The bout was scheduled to take place September 15 at Madison Square Garden. It was pushed back two weeks, but with a city in mourning, the atmosphere was decidedly less celebratory for such a historic event than it would have been under more normal circumstances, despite the fact that a sellout crowd of 19,075 was on hand.

To make matters even more stressful for Trinidad, it was revealed that the married father with two daughters also had a daughter out of wedlock with a television model.

What happened: In the early rounds, Hopkins controlled the distance and pace with his jab, while Trinidad was unable to set his feet to punch because of his foe's constant circling. Hopkins made his first statement when, at the end of a nondescript second round, he landed a bull's-eye right hand that would become his signature weapon that night. Trinidad took it well, but the only round he'd win decisively wouldn't come until the sixth, when he landed a series of left hooks, especially a searing one to the flanks and a hook after the bell.

Although Trinidad initiated the bullying by shoving his forearm in Hopkins' throat on a clinch on the ropes, Hopkins didn't retaliate. Instead, he stuck to his game plan to counter Trinidad's left hooks with perfectly timed right hands, and by the eighth round, he had seized complete control.

A counter right uppercut at the end of the 10th round turned Trinidad's legs to putty, and come the 12th, Hopkins landed a counter right hand—after yet another Trinidad hook that missed by a mile—to send the Puerto Rican icon to the canvas. Tito got up by the count of nine, but his father, Don Felix, told referee Steve Smoger to stop the fight, which he did at the 1:43 mark.

Postscript: The Sugar Ray Robinson Trophy presentation to the tournament winner turned into an insulting farce when Hopkins wasn't presented with it at the postfight press conference as originally scheduled. According to King, the trophy was locked away at Madison Square Garden and no one present had the key. The truth, however, was that Trinidad's name was already engraved on the trophy and it had to be refinished, prompting King's lame excuse.

Unfortunately, much of the momentum Hopkins had achieved with the signature victory was marred by a litany of bad business decisions, including the firing of longtime trainer Bouie Fisher (the pair has since reconciled), losing a $610,000 slander lawsuit to former adviser Lou DiBella, and bungling negotiations for lucrative fights with Roy Jones, James Toney, and Joe Calzaghe. Until signing to fight De La Hoya several years later, Hopkins never fully capitalized on his fairytale ascent to the undisputed title.

Trinidad would fight once more, a fourth-round knockout of former middleweight titleholder Hassine Cherifi in May 2002, and then retire before announcing his return to the ring in 2004. ■

Johnnie Whitehead is an editor at USA Today and a regular contributor to this magazine.

Hopkins stops Trinidad to unify middleweight title

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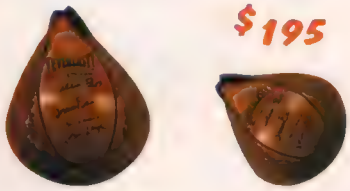

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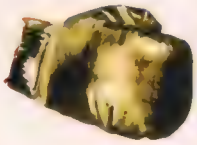

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THE TWENTY GREATEST MIDDLEWEIGHTS OF ALL-TIME

By William Dettloff

You're a fight guy. You watch them whenever you can, you read all you can get your fingers on, and you know your stuff. Inside and out. When a boxing question pops up on a sports trivia quiz, you get it right every time. The guy sitting next to you, the one debating with you about who the greatest middleweights are, doesn't know what you know. He thinks he does, but he doesn't. How could he say Fullmer was better than Cerdan? Is he nuts? How could he pick Monzon over Hagler? Griffith over Flowers? Please. But don't act like you don't like the debate. We know you do.

We like it as much as you do, so we couldn't resist putting together our selections of the 20 greatest middleweights ever. You'll find all the middleweights you know and love in here, maybe some you hate and maybe one or two you never heard of. It's all right. You'll know them when you're done.

Some important notes: The rankings are not based on who would have beaten whom. Rather, the placements are grounded on what the fighters achieved at middleweight: the quality of their opposition, how they fared against their contemporaries, if they were champions the number of title defenses they made, how well they performed in their biggest fights, and, perhaps most importantly, how consistent they were at the weight and for how long. That's paramount. Roy Jones, for example, doesn't make the cut because even though he was often spectacular at 160, he was off and running to 168 before we knew it.

In some cases, exemplary performance in especially big fights or an exceptionally high-quality level of opposition tilt the scale and compensate, to a degree, for the lack of advanced middleweight tenure. But the work has to have been done at 160 to be considered.

Along the same lines, division-hopping isn't rewarded here even when done by the legends. Sugar Ray Robinson, for instance, gets no extra credit for being virtually unbeatable at welterweight. Mickey Walker, Carmen Basilio, Emile Griffith, and Tommy Ryan, all welterweight champions before winning titles at middleweight, are rated and measured as middleweights only. Same with Dick Tiger, who went on to the light heavyweight title.

One last rule: Any fighter still active in the middleweight division is ineligible, since it's not fair to judge a fighter's standing among the all-time greats before his career is over. So don't freak out when you read through the next 20 pages and can't find Bernard Hopkins.

Even with all these rules and qualifying events and factors, this isn't scientific stuff. Records aren't perfect, perception isn't, and heaven knows we're not. We think we got it right anyway, but then, you won't know until you start reading.

1 HARRY GREB

115-8-3 (51) with 183 no-decisions
World Champion 1923-'26

Let's face it: It's hard to conceive of a guy like Greb as the best 160-pound fighter there ever was. He wasn't easy on the eyes, first off. His nose was beaten concave, his ears were puffed up and gnarled, and his body, though sinewy, wouldn't win any beauty contests. He was pale and short and wore a mug that screamed palooka. His style in the ring wasn't much better; he barreled forward with neither grace nor skill and hammered and hammered at whatever was in front of him, and if his fists didn't get there right or often enough, his elbows, shoulders, head, or an educated set of laces did. To complete the picture, he trained on whiskey and whores, in that order. He didn't have Sugar Ray Robinson's skill or Stanley Ketchel's power or Carlos Monzon's cool. But he got more business done at middleweight than any of them.

It's not just that Greb brutalized future heavyweight king Gene Tunney in their first match in 1922 (which actually was contested for the American light heavyweight title), or that in two of their four follow-ups he whipped the well-connected Tunney outright, but didn't get the decisions. Nor is it just that, as the lore goes, he fought the last five years of his career half-blind after Kid Norfolk detached his retina in a 10-rounder in '21. Greb is the best middleweight ever because he fought most frequently at the highest level over the longest period of time against the best competition. It arguably could be said that there has never been a more consistent fighter, at any weight.

It can be argued against Greb that his title reign was brief compared to other middleweight legends—just three years between the time he butchered Johnny Wilson to win the title in '23 and was outboxed and dethroned by Tiger Flowers in '26. But during that span, he fought an unimaginable 57 times, beating, among others, Tommy Loughran, Mickey Walker, Johnny Papke, Ted Moore, Jimmy Slattery, Tony Marullo, and Bryan Downey, each leading contenders or former or future champions. (He also scored newspaper decisions over Flowers and "Slapsie" Maxie Rosenbloom.) Loughran, who eventually would win the light heavyweight title and find his own place in the Hall of Fame, could do no better than one win in his five bouts against Greb.

You want tough? Greb was stopped twice in 298 fights: in '13 by Joe Chip, and then again when he broke his arm against Kid Graves in Pittsburgh two years later. Consider also that he accomplished all that he did with only average hitting power; with only 51 stoppages in nearly 300 fights, he wasn't blowing away anyone early. Those who submitted did so at the strength of his will, not the strength of his punches.

Like most 160-pounders in that era, Greb dabbled at light heavy fairly often and even heavyweight on occasion; the crazy SOB tried like hell to get a fight with Jack Dempsey, but it never came off. Still, the great bulk of his work came at 160, and no other middleweight in history amassed such a record against better competition. Not Robinson, not Monzon, not Ketchel, not Hagler. Even if they looked better while trying.

2 SUGAR RAY ROBINSON

175-19-6 (109) with 2 no-contests
World Champion 1951, '51-52, '55-57, '57, '58-'60

We've gotten so used to seeing Robinson's name at the top of lists—the best welterweight ever, the best of the 20th century, the best pound-for-pound—that it seems odd to see him at number two here. But the middleweight Robinson was not the welterweight Robinson. He was slower, older, and, particularly after returning in 1954 from a short-lived retirement, somewhat inconsistent.

It's true that the middleweight Robinson bested Jake LaMotta in '51 for the title in the last of their six wars; four times beat his favorite punching bag, Carl "Bobo" Olson; blew away former champ Rocky Graziano; and turned back both Gene Fullmer and Carmen Basilio. But he also lost to Basilio and Fullmer, not to mention Randy Turpin, Ralph "Tiger" Jones, and Paul Pender. And the old, washed-up Robinson who dropped decisions to Terry Downes, Joey Giardello, and, in the final year, Stan Harrington and Joey Archer, among a couple of others, was a middleweight. In fact, Robinson's record from the time he beat LaMotta for the title until he retired for good after losing to Archer—essentially his record at 160—is a respectable but hardly spectacular 54-17-4 (30) with 2 no-contests, not including his failed attempt to wrest the light heavyweight title from Joey Maxim in '52.

Having said all that, Robinson is still the second-best middleweight ever. Why? Several reasons: First, quality counts over quantity. No other middleweight, including Harry Greb, beat as many Hall of Fame-bound 160-pounders. Robinson's victories over LaMotta, Basilio, Fullmer, Olson, and Graziano—even if Fullmer won their series 2-1-1—cannot be discounted. Overall, Robinson's record against that star-studded group is 12-4-1. Now throw in wins over Turpin and Rocky Castellani and Holley Mims. That's a ridiculously high success rate against a superior collection of middleweight champions and contenders.

Second, no other 160-pound fighter—indeed, few fighters at any weight—transcended the game the way Robinson did. He wasn't just a fighter, he was a star and an immensely popular champion when the division was filled with exceptionally good, tough, charismatic fighters. If you were a middleweight in the '50s and you wanted a big-money fight, you knew you had to fight Robinson. His wars with Basilio and Fullmer were huge events, and his one-punch, fifth-round stoppage of Fullmer in '57 is quite possibly the most perfect knockout ever recorded of one man over another.

And finally, on his best day as a middleweight, which may have been the "St. Valentine's Day Massacre" win over LaMotta, Robinson probably could have whipped any other middleweight in history, including Greb. Even at 160 he was as close as you could come to perfection in a prize ring. Close enough to make him the second-best middleweight ever.

3 CARLOS MONZON

87-3-9 (59) with 1 no-contest
World Champion 1970-'77

Discussion of Monzon's place among the great middleweights usually spawns some degree of discord in fight quarters. To the majority, he's easily one of the three of four best ever. How can you dispute 82 fights and 13 years without a loss, a division-record 14 successful defenses, and a seven-year reign? You can't. Not really. Even if you figure that half of his opponents were Argentine jelly donuts, and that a fair number of those 14 defenses came against similar softies. What did Jean-Claude Bouttier ever do, or Tom Bogs, or Tony Licata, or Tony Mundine? Nothing, really. And that's where Monzon's detractors base their argument. The middleweight division Monzon ruled was not overly deep. There was no Robinson, no Greb, no Ketchel or Hagler or even a Fullmer.

The rub is this: There were some very good middleweights who might have been great had it not been for Monzon. Try Bennie Briscoe, one of the sturdiest contenders around, whom Monzon drew with in Buenos Aries in 1967 and then decisioned in a title defense in '72. Try Nino Benvenuti, who was 82-4-1 when Monzon knocked him cold in 12 to win the title in '70, before turning the trick again in three a year later. Or how about an older but still dangerous Emile Griffith, whom Monzon stopped in '71—one of only two knockout losses Griffith suffered in a 112-bout career—and then decisioned in '73?

The list goes on: Rodrigo Valdes, who twice lost on points to Monzon. Or Jose Napoles, the great welterweight champion who, even though he was a natural 147-pounder, surely would have beaten a fair number of the middleweight champions who follow Monzon on these pages. No, there aren't a lot of Hall of Famers on Monzon's record (three to be exact: Benvenuti, Griffith, and Napoles). But if you think Larry Holmes was an all-time great, if you think Julio Cesar Chavez is one of the best ever, you have to count Monzon too. Because both Holmes and Chavez fought their share of tomato cans and taxi cab drivers. Guys who fight into triple digits over an extended period of time are going to face bums sometimes because unless you're a middleweight in the '20s or '40s or a welterweight in the '80s, you can't fight a star every time out. There just aren't enough to go around.

Give Monzon credit too for going out on top, even if was dropped by Valdes in their rematch and struggled a bit before recording his 14th title defense and calling it a career. He could have fought another year or two and won a few more even though he was 35 by that time. But what would have been the point? He'd cleaned out the division. Marvin Hagler wasn't ready for him yet. Hugo Corro, Vito Antuofermo, and Alan Minter, his successors after Valdes, didn't belong in the same time zone with him, never mind the same ring. Monzon did everything we could ask a middleweight champion to do and then some. Only two did it better.

4 MARVELOUS MARVIN HAGLER

62-3-2 (52)
World Champion 1980-'87

It can be accurately said that the degree to which a champion hates losing is roughly equal in parts to how badly he lusts for victory. What does it say then that Hagler, after losing the title to Sugar Ray Leonard in 1987, took off for Italy to make action movies and never once entered a ring again? The defeat hurt him. Deeply. It wasn't like his early-career losses to Bobby Watts and Willie Monroe; those he avenged, emphatically, with knockout victories.

The Leonard fight? That was too much to bear. He thought he won it and a lot of others did, too. But he also knew he'd never get a return, and even if he did, he'd be too old to do anything with it. He was a tired 33 the first time around—Leonard had timed it well, you see—and his feet and hands had gotten slow and heavy with age. No, the next time would be worse. Much worse. So he did the only thing he could do: He said to hell with it and comforted himself with his memories and an absolute certainty that at his best, he was one of the finest middleweights ever.

Hagler's middleweight heaven was a bit deeper than the one Carlos Monzon ruled 10 years earlier. Of his 12 title defenses, a few came against guys who wouldn't have been credible or long-reigning champions even if Hagler had never been born, guys like Caveman Lee, Wilford Scypion, Tony Sibson, and the mediocre bleeder Hagler ravaged for the title, Alan Minter. But there were some hard-nosed, skilled fighters in the mix, too. They didn't come tougher than Mustafa Hamsho, whom Hagler twice took apart, stopping him both times. Roberto Duran had just butchered poor Davey Moore for the junior middleweight title and was a full six years away from spanking Iran Barkley for the WBC 160-pound belt when Hagler decisioned him in '83.

There were others. Vito Antuofermo lucked into a draw when Hagler finally got his first shot at the title in '79, and was destroyed in the rematch two years later. Bennie Briscoe, too, whom Hagler decisioned in '78 and, of course, Thomas Hearns, who co-starred in one of the greatest fights ever before Hagler knocked him stiff in the third.

Hagler had all the tools a great fighter needs: speed, heavy hands, skill, a rock-hard chin, endurance. But lots of fighters have those things. They each can be fastened, to one degree or another, in the gym. Hagler also had what only other all-time greats have: a deep hatred for losing. He could have dropped to his knees and stayed put after taking any one of the dozens of right hands the murderous-punching John Mugabi laid on him in '86. Same for the Hearns fight. But he couldn't. It wasn't in his nature. Just like it wasn't in his nature to hang around anymore after losing to Leonard. Who needed it? He'd proved all he needed to and had every right to turn his back on the game and get out. He earned the right the same way he earned his place among the very best 160-pound fighters ever: by being Marvelous.

5 JAKE LaMOTTA

83-19-4 (30)
World Champion 1949-'51

What a shame it is that if not for the film *Raging Bull*, a whole generation or two of boxing fans wouldn't know who LaMotta is or what he did at middleweight in the 1940s and early-'50s. It's true that the film didn't center on LaMotta's in-the-ring battles as much as it did his battles outside the ropes. But the direction was true and the plot loyal enough to his history that even uneducated viewers got a sense that LaMotta was a special fighter.

But even if the film had never been made, if Robert DeNiro and Martin Scorsese had thought the script too seamy and passed it by, fight game guys would remember LaMotta. You don't forget a guy who fought the great Sugar Ray Robinson down to the wire six times, including handing him his first loss, a decision in Detroit in '43. That was the best Robinson there ever was, and LaMotta whipped him fair and square. You don't forget a guy who beat every good middleweight contender out there—and there were a lot—all through the decade, guys like Hall of Famer Fritzie Zivic, whom LaMotta beat three times, or Jackie Wilson, or Tommy Bell, or George Costner, Jose Basora, or Holman Williams. The names mean nothing if all you know about LaMotta you learned from the movie, but they were all top-flight contenders during a sinfully fertile period in middleweight history.

LaMotta didn't care. He'd fight anyone anywhere—though he was partial to Detroit—but he couldn't get what he wanted until he threw a fight against Billy Fox in '47, in a bout he could have won without breaking a sweat on the worst day of his life. But it got him his title shot, and so what if Marcel Cerdan hurt his shoulder. LaMotta's scar tissue had scar tissue, he'd been busted up and hurt so many times, and if Cerdan couldn't fight through the pain then to hell with him, LaMotta deserved the title.

Forget that LaMotta's reign lasted under two years and he managed just a pair of defenses. If the guys in the dark suits and all the cash hadn't frozen him out so long and strung him along because he wouldn't play their game, he'd have been the champ years before. He was already burnt out when he got the shot and even then, in the so-called "St. Valentines Day Massacre" fight with Robinson in '51, LaMotta led on two cards after eight rounds. But he was all dried out and used up from making 160, and he had nothing left when Robinson started teeing off late. Still he took everything the best fighter in history could give him, and at the end was looking him in the eye.

It was all over after the last Robinson fight. LaMotta got stopped by Irish Bob Murphy the next time out, won a few, lost a few, and quit for good after losing to Billy Kilgore in Miami in '54. But it was all right, because he had made his mark. Not just on Robinson, but on the era and on the souls of every man who fought him. No, he wasn't a great man—the movie made that clear—but he was a great fighter. And that's all he wanted to be.

6 CHARLEY BURLEY

84-11-2 (50) with 1 no-contest
Contender 1941-'46

Burley never was the middleweight champion. He never wrote a book, and no one made a movie about his life. He never appeared on *The Ed Sullivan Show* and he probably was rarely called "champ" by anyone. He should have had all those things. He should have made a million or two fighting Cerdan and Robinson and Conn and Zale and other middleweight stars. There were enough of them around. He should have gotten to drive around in a bright pink Cadillac and been swarmed by fans wherever he went, like Robinson did. A lot of things should have happened for Burley that didn't because he was too good and too black and because he didn't play games. He wasn't interested in losing the first to set up a series or doing a swan dive to get a title shot. So he never was the middleweight champion.

Burley was good enough. So good that he beat Fritzie Zivic two out of three and future middleweight champion Billy Soose. So good that he knocked out Shorty Hogue and decisioned Archie Moore, who, after ending a 234-bout career, called Burley the toughest man he'd ever faced. He was good enough so that a lot of guys didn't want to fight him, so he kept on facing great middleweight contender Holman Williams. You remember Williams. He's often credited with teaching some kid named Joe Louis how to box. Burley and Williams fought seven times, each winning three with a no-contest thrown in for good measure. Burley was a good enough middleweight to twice go the distance with future heavyweight king Ezzard Charles, and good enough to knock out contenders Jackie Burke, Baby Kid Chocolate, J.D. Turner, and Harvey Massey, among others. He was good enough.

Burley never was the middleweight champion, in part because Ken Overlin, the champ in 1940, which is when Burley was just starting to hit his middleweight stride, wanted no part of him. Neither did Soose when he beat Overlin for the title in '41; remember, Burley beat Soose silly back in '38. Zale could have given Burley a shot after he won the title in '41, or after the war was over in '46. But he didn't. Instead he went to war again, this time against Rocky Graziano—who, you'll note, never fought Burley either. But then neither did Robinson or Cerdan or LaMotta. None of the great middleweights wanted Burley. Too good, too black.

Other black fighters from Burley's era made it, you might argue. Moore and Charles did it, after all. Yes they did, but after too many years of struggle. They should have been champions well before they were crowned. Many didn't make it. Not really. Jimmy Bivins, Holman Williams, Lloyd Marshall, George Costner. And neither did Burley, whom Eddie Futch, the greatest trainer in the history of the world, called the finest all-around fighter he ever saw. Burley never was the middleweight champion. He should have been.

7 TIGER FLOWERS

115-14-6 (53) with 21 no-decisions, 1 no-contest
World Champion 1926

Slick, fast southpaws aren't a recent invention. Before there was Stevie Johnston or Mark Johnson, there was Tiger Flowers. Before there was Pernell Whitaker or Marvin Hagler, there was Flowers, and if you think guys from the 1970s, '80s, and '90s wished good southpaws had been outlawed along with bare knuckles and 25-round fights, imagine how the middleweights of the '20s felt. They had Flowers to contend with.

Flowers as a middleweight champion was an anomaly in the '20s, and not just because he was a religious man—hence the moniker "The Georgia Deacon"—but because while Harry Greb and Mickey Walker and guys like them were out of control and raising all kinds of hell, both in and out of the ring, Flowers was quietly going about his business and doing so without much fanfare or flash. Where Greb and Walker liked to follow up a left hook with a good elbow or head-butt, Flowers preferred a stiff right jab. Where Greb and Walker charged, Flowers maneuvered. And when Greb and Walker engaged in their supposed barroom brawl after their 15-rounder in '25, you can bet that Flowers was in a church somewhere or at home memorizing scripture.

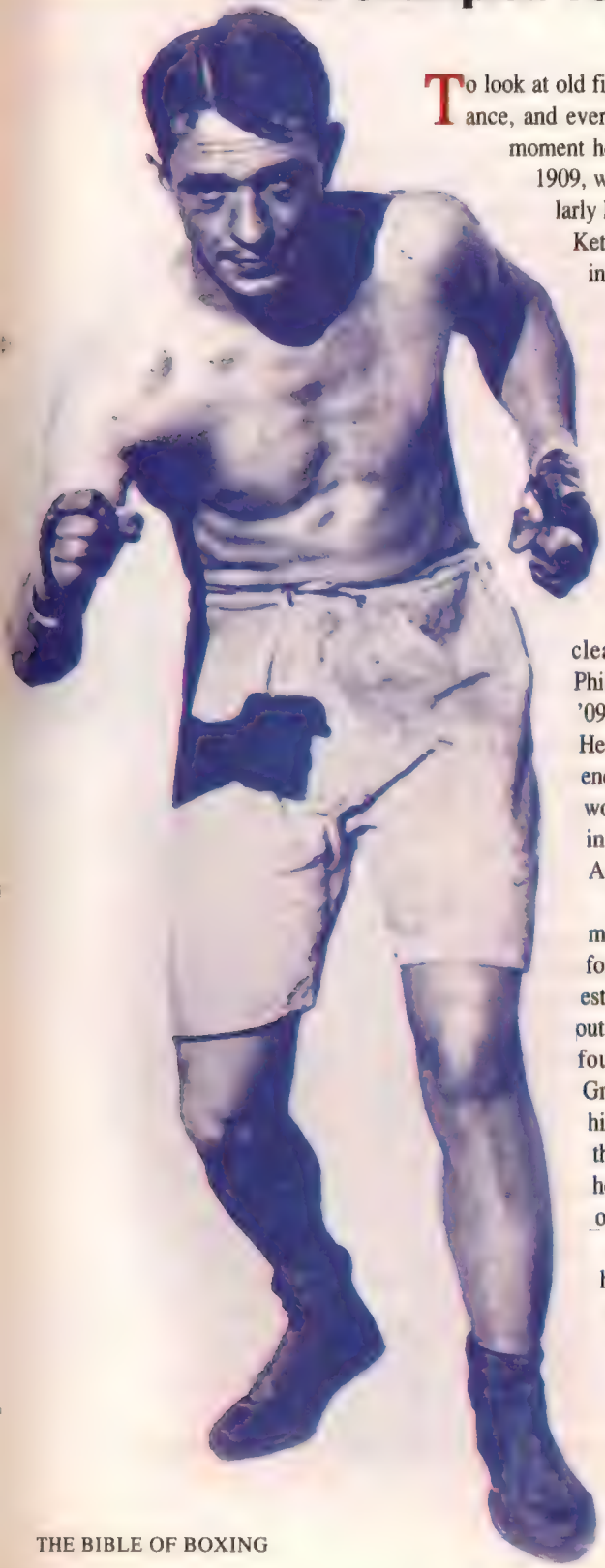
It probably isn't fair to measure Flowers' successes against that of Greb and Walker, two of history's more celebrated and adored middleweight characters. Flowers' accomplishments stand on their own and they include becoming the first black man to win the middleweight title. They include dozens of fights against light heavyweights and a few against heavyweights that he had to take because guys his own size didn't like getting smacked around. They include a host of wins over other good, middleweight fighters such as Lou Bogash, Jock Malone, Johnny Wilson, and Frank Moody. And, they include two wins over Greb: the first to claim the title '26, and then the rematch six months later. Credit Greb in the first match for sucking Flowers into fighting his fight; the two wrestled, gouged, and hit one another low—when in Rome and all—and still Flowers won. That he got the decision again in the rematch, against a far more popular figure, tells you it wasn't that close.

The books tell you Walker dethroned Flowers over 10 rounds the following December in Chicago. Don't believe it. Everyone who saw it knew Flowers whipped Walker clean. The Illinois State Athletic Commission allegedly investigated the decision afterward, but you know how that goes. Walker was loved. He was "The Toy Bulldog" after all, which is loads more fun than a Georgia Deacon, especially in the Roaring '20s. So Walker went home with the middleweight title and ducked a rematch with Flowers for the next year.

Flowers did all right that year, '27, losing to Leo Lomski, but drawing twice with future Hall of Famer Maxie Rosenbloom, and notching 14 wins. He was still trying for a rematch with Walker when he died following surgery to repair scar tissue around his eyes. Same thing had happened to Greb a year earlier. If Flowers had survived the operation, maybe gotten the rematch with Walker, who knows where he'd rank among the great middleweights. Maybe higher than Greb. Maybe right here. Either way, next time you watch some smart, slick southpaw going off on someone, know that Flowers led the way.

8 STANLEY KETCHEL

52-4-4 (49) with 4 no-decisions
World Champion 1908, '08-'10



To look at old films of Ketchel, you'd think he was a bum. Everything was wild, off-balance, and every two seconds he was clinching and mauling. Even the most glorious moment he had, which was the second or two he had Jack Johnson on the mat in 1909, was produced by a right hand that hardly looked educated or even particularly hard. It was clumsy and long, and the second Johnson got up, he flattened Ketchel with a right of his own, snapping off several of the challenger's teeth in the process.

So big deal. Ketchel scored a flash knockdown of Johnson and couldn't even look good doing that. Why is he on this list? Because despite his collapse against Johnson, and despite how inept he looks on film today, he dominated the middleweight division in the 20th century's first decade. There wasn't a 160-pound fighter in the world he wouldn't or didn't face. And with the lone exception of Maurice Thompson, who decisioned him twice in Ketchel's first full year as a pro, no middleweight got the best of him.

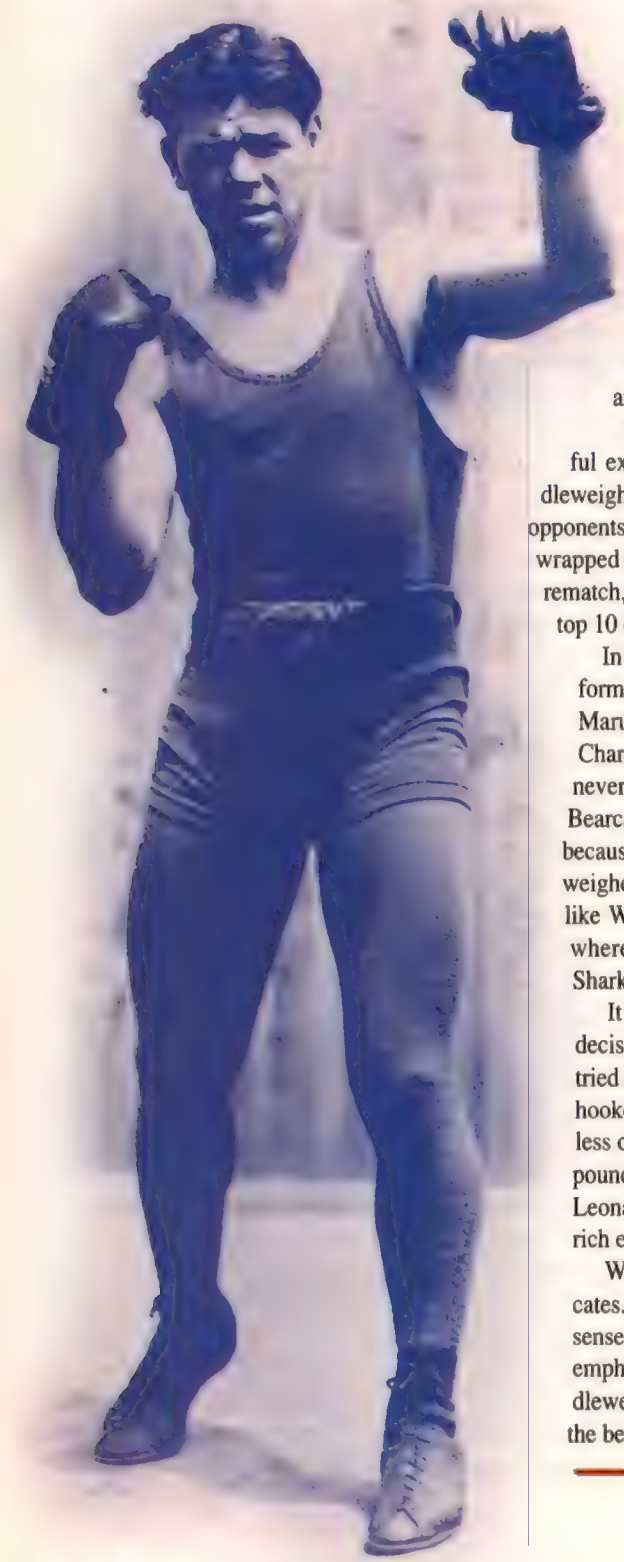
Not Billy Papke, who stopped him in 12 in '08 when he clocked Ketchel in the throat when the two were supposed to shake hands at the opening bell. Ketchel spent the next 11 rounds trying unsuccessfully to clear his head, but he twice ravaged Papke in returns. Not the great Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, who fought Ketchel to a 10-round no-decision in '09 even though Ketchel decked him four times in the ninth and 10th rounds. He obliterated him in three later the same year in the rematch. Even the legendary Sam Langford, the guy who scared witless every white fighter in the world, wasn't too scary for Ketchel. They fought to a six-round no-decision in '10, though the newspaper guys called it a win for "The Michigan Assassin."

What made Ketchel so good that it took him just six years to win the middleweight title and all but clean out the division with no virtually no formal training? Look again at his record. He was quite probably the hardest-hitting middleweight in history. In '05, he won 17 fights, all by knockout. The following year he won six, all stoppages. The year after, five wins, four knockouts. Forget Sugar Ray Robinson's right hand and Rocky Graziano's, too. Rodrigo Valdes was a banger also, but not like Ketchel. He hit harder than any of them and has the record to prove it. How good was this guy? Of his four career losses, one was to Johnson, one of the best heavyweights ever, two were to Thompson when he was still a rookie, and one to Papke, avenged twice.

Ketchel might have held the title another 10 years if Walter Dipley hadn't shot him over some dame in 1910. He had just scored quick stoppage wins over Willie Lewis and Jim Smith, and there wasn't another middleweight threat to him as far as the eye could see. So don't believe it when the guy looks awful on film. He was the best there was when he was fighting, and not by a little. No one came close.

9 MICKEY WALKER

93-19-4 (60) with 46 no-decisions, 1 no-contest
World Champion 1926-'31



Most people, when they think of Walker, think of his ridiculously brave performance against Max Schmeling in 1932. They think of how he kept bouncing up and tearing into Schmeling even though he was little more than a chubby welterweight, for crying out loud, wading into a guy who was still four years away from knocking the stuffing out of a young, prime Joe Louis. They think of that or they think of how he held future heavyweight champion Jack Sharkey to a draw in '31. Either way, neither of those performances are what make Walker one of the best middleweights ever, though certainly they don't hurt. Picture Bernard Hopkins challenging Evander Holyfield or Mike Tyson, and you get a sense for the kind of middleweight Walker was.

Walker places where he does because in addition to his frequently successful exploits at light heavy and above—though he rarely weighed over the middleweight limit—his record is solid against a collection of high-quality middleweight opponents. If you can put aside the fact that the title was handed to him with a gift-wrapped decision over Tiger Flowers in '26, and that he then expertly avoided a rematch, you can accept that he was a fine champion and worthy of appearing in the top 10 of all-time.

In his first two years with the belt, Walker beat contender Tommy Milligan, former light heavyweight champions Mike McTigue and Paul Berlenbach, Tony Marullo, and the highly rated Ace Hudkins. After that came Leo Lomski and Charley Belanger and Mike Mandell, among others. Also remember that Walker never lost the middleweight title in the ring; he relinquished it after decisioning Bearcat Wright in Omaha. Not because he couldn't make the weight anymore or because he was bored. Wright stood a foot taller than the stubby Walker and outweighed him by 100 pounds, and Walker figured if he could handle a behemoth like Wright, what was he doing making chump change at 160? Heavyweight was where the real money was, and next thing we knew Walker was outfighting Sharkey, even though the guys with the pencils at ringside called it a draw.

It's true that Walker lost to the best middleweights of his era; Harry Greb decisioned him over 15 in '25 when Walker, the welterweight champ at the time, tried to move up. (Rumor had it he didn't fare much better when he and Greb hooked up again at a local speakeasy afterward.) And Flowers beat him, regardless of what the record books say. But he beat his share of top-flight 160 and 170-pounders, and he did it with style. Along with Greb, Jack Dempsey, and Benny Leonard, he epitomized the Roaring '20s and left an indelible mark on that talent-rich era.

Walker probably was a better middleweight than this placement here indicates. His adventures at 175 and beyond elevate his status in a pound-for-pound sense, but they hurt him in an analysis of great middleweight fighters, where the emphasis is on the business that got done at 160. Still, his body of work at middleweight justifies not only his spot in the Hall of Fame, but his placement among the best 160-pound fighters ever.

10 BILLY CONN

63-12-1 (14)
Contender 1937-'39

Sometimes a fighter's best work goes unnoticed by history because other things, more provocative things, get all the attention. Conn, of course, is best remembered for having the great Joe Louis all but whipped going into the 13th round of their 1941 heavyweight title fight, then getting stupid—or Irish, as he would say later—and getting knocked out. He's also recalled, to a lesser degree perhaps, as one of the five or six best light heavyweight champions ever. That's warranted. He was a wonderful 175-pound champion who made three defenses against good competition before realizing his quickness and skill could make an awful lot of heavyweights look silly and at the same time line his pockets green.

But for all of his accomplishments at 175 and above, Conn's best work came at middleweight. He started out at welter in '34 and was 160 or thereabouts by '37, the year after he slapped around and outpointed Fritzie Zivic in an all-Pittsburgh showdown. In that year Conn beat Babe Risko, the former NBA New York middleweight champion; he beat Vince Dundee, who won the same title from Lou Brouillard; he beat top contender Teddy Yarosz, twice; he split a pair of bouts with former welterweight champ Young Corbett III; and he lost a 12-rounder to future NBA 160-pound champ Solly Kreiger.

The middleweight Conn wasn't done. The following year he twice outpointed top contender Honeyboy Jones, dropped one to Yarosz, then scored four straight wins: two over Kreiger and back-to-back non-title victories over middleweight champ Fred Apostoli, who was still four fights away from losing the title officially to Ceferino Garcia. One fight later, Conn was the light heavyweight champion and his days at middleweight were essentially done.

Compare that body of work to that drawn at light heavy and heavyweight: two wins over Melio Bettina (the first for the title), two defenses against Gus Lesnevich, eight victories over a mixed bag of heavyweight contenders, and the Louis fights. (Conn relinquished the light heavyweight title after stopping Gunnar Barlund in eight rounds in April '41.) Remember also that although Conn's announced weight for the first match with Louis was 174, everyone knew he wasn't that big. Conn himself later revealed that he was only 169 if he was a pound and that he had to work to get that high.

Ezzard Charles isn't counted among most historians' top 10 heavyweights ever, but if there was a more dominant light heavyweight, we never saw him. And he never won that title. The same could be said, though admittedly without quite the same degree of conviction, about Gene Tunney. It just works out that way sometimes. Conn wasn't the cream of the crop at 160, but if you believe he is an all-time great, it's largely his work at middleweight that makes him so.

11 MARCEL CERDAN

106-4 (61)
World Champion 1948-'49

Americans often times scoff at European fighters, regardless of how many wins they've accrued. Sometimes it's warranted. Fighters build big, glossy records in Europe, come to the States, and flop. Who could blame us for being skeptical? We'd seen it before.

Cerdan was 95-2 (54) before he ever crossed the Atlantic, and both of his losses were by disqualification. But all those wins came in Casablanca and Algiers and Paris and Rome, and his record was predominantly amassed against other European fighters. The French were crazy about him, naturally, as was most of Europe. They said he was an exceptionally sound boxer and an accurate puncher and that our guys in the States had better be prepared. Whatever. So what that he'd won the Inter-Allied Tournament during the war, and the French middleweight title, and the European middleweight title? He may as well have been fighting amateurs.

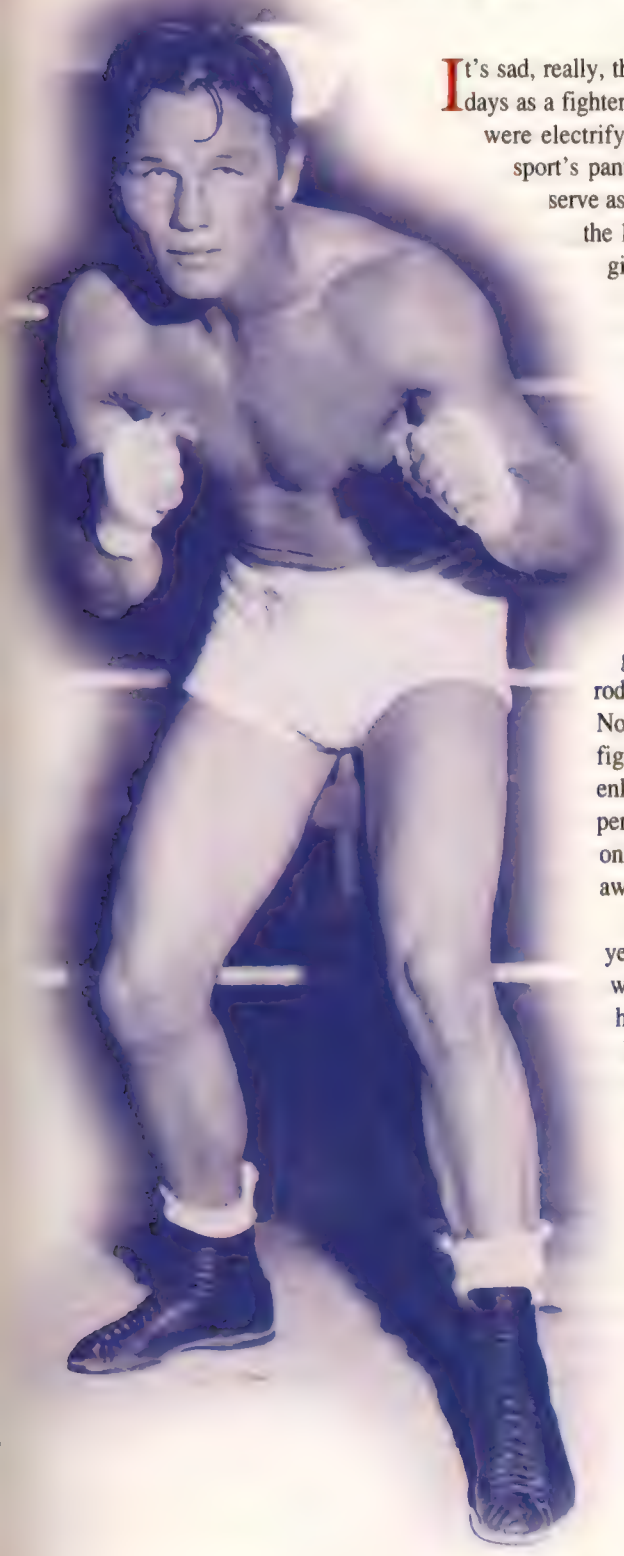
We should have known Cerdan was the goods when veteran hard-luck middleweight contender Holman Williams went over to Paris to face him and was sent home with a 10-round decision loss on his record. Two fights later, in December of '46, Cerdan finally made his debut in New York and dealt the same result to Georgie Abrams, another top-notch contender and former world title challenger. Suddenly, Cerdan was a legitimate contender, and just in case anyone wasn't convinced yet, three fights later he flattened Harold Green, who had twice decisioned Rocky Graziano. (Graziano also stopped Green in '45.)

Okay, so now America was interested, finally, but Cerdan played hard to get for a little while, notching a couple of wins in Paris before returning to New York and stopping Lavern Roach in New York in eight. Back to Paris, an unexpected loss to Cyrille Delannoit—avenged two months later—and all of the sudden there was Cerdan, all handsome and suave with his curly hair and charisma staring across the Jersey City ring at All-American "Man Of Steel" Tony Zale. Zale had already been to hell and back against Graziano, and was at the end of the line, but Cerdan was up there too; he was 32 and those who had seen him four or five years earlier in Europe swore he already was on the downside.

It didn't matter how old Cerdan was and it may not have mattered if Zale was a spry 25-year-old. More than 20,000 fans watched the Frenchman box rings around Zale, who, except for when he rocked Cerdan in the fourth with a right, was never in it. After a couple of non-title wins, Cerdan's shoulder went out against LaMotta and he never got to show us how he'd have done against him with two good shoulders. The plane he was in on the way to the rematch crashed into a mountain. But he'd already proved he was no European flunky. He'd already proved he belonged with the great middleweights.

12 TONY ZALE

67-18-2 (45)
World Champion 1941-'47, '48



It's sad, really, that the fights for which Zale is best remembered came well past his best days as a fighter. His two wars with Rocky Graziano—the third was rather a walkover—were electrifying, brutal affairs that today, more than 50 years later, remain in the sport's pantheon of great fights, immortalized forever in words and pictures. They serve as stark examples of how great the middleweight division was then, back in the 1940s, when two skilled, hard-nosed warriors took the best the other could give, and all anyone could do who saw them was gasp.

The truth is Zale was pretty much done by the time Graziano got to him in '47 and took the title in their second fight. He was 34 by then with a lot of hard miles on his ticker. His first year in the pro ranks had come 13 years earlier when he lost six out of his first 21; in his second year he dropped three more, two by knockout. But he got better. The next year he lost just two of eight, and the next two of 11. By the time he took the NBA middleweight title with a 13th-round kayo of Al Holstak in Seattle, he had run up a 12-fight winning streak. He wasn't overwhelming, but Zale had a solid chin, a wicked body attack, and a heck of a punch. And once he got going, his will was impossible to break.

Except for a decision loss to Billy Soose in August '40, Zale had gotten it together by the time his shot at the world title presented itself. He rode a seven-bout winning streak into his fight with slick Georgie Abrams in November '41 and didn't disappoint, taking the 15-round decision. Just one fight followed before the war—a decision loss to Billy Conn—and Zale enlisted. Those were probably the best years Zale was going to have, that period from '43 to '45 when he was helping to fight the good fight. He was only 30, he had never been a better fighter than he was then, and he wasted away during those years, the way Joe Louis and a few others did.

Maybe Zale would have accomplished much more had he not lost those years. Maybe he'd be remembered for something other than the two wars with Graziano. It could be worse. Pugs by the thousands have fought their hearts out for years for the kind of legacy Zale and Graziano left, for the kind of money they made, for the kind of fame they earned and enjoyed. Even if Zale had accomplished nothing else, he'd always be remembered for the Graziano fights and their brutality. Some fighters no one remembers.

In retrospect, maybe it's better that Zale met Graziano when he was over the hill. Had he faced him closer to his prime, say in '41, he'd probably have starched him without incident and gone on to enjoy a fairly nondescript title reign. His own vulnerability, brought on by age, made the fights with Graziano what they were. And for them Zale should be remembered.

13 EMILE GRIFFITH

85-24-2 (23) with 1 no-contest
World Champion 1966-'67, '67-'68

Like Sugar Ray Robinson, Griffith was a better welterweight than middleweight. At 147, he won the world title in just his fourth year as a pro, played hot potato with it a couple of times, losing it to Benny Paret, regaining it, losing it to Luis Rodriguez, regaining it. He did the same thing at middleweight, losing the belt to Nino Benvenuti in 1967, regaining it from him, losing it again. Sort of the way Robinson lost the middleweight title to Carmen Basilio, regained it, lost it to Gene Fullmer, regained it again.

That's pretty much where any similarities to Robinson end. Benvenuti was no Fullmer or Basilio, and Griffith was no Sugar Ray. He didn't have Robinson's power or speed or overall skill. But he was smart enough and versatile enough to adapt his style to better match his opponents'. Whatever it took, most times Griffith could do it. If he was facing a bigger, stronger guy, like Dick Tiger, he could move and box and keep his man on the outside. Against someone without power, he could muscle his way inside and use a set of shoulders that were wider and bigger than any middleweight had a right to own.

Griffith didn't waste any time when he decided to move up. In '66 he went right after Tiger, who had just regained the crown from Joey Giardello the year before, and decisioned him over 15 rounds in New York. He did it by moving and keeping the muscle-bound Tiger tied up in knots. Then he switched gears again, turning into a pressure fighter to twice squeak by New York rival Joey Archer. Then came the first loss to Benvenuti. He beat the tall European in the return, then lost it again in '68, and just like that his days as a middleweight champion were over.

You'd think Griffith's impact at 160 would have ended there, but if it did, he wouldn't be on these pages. Although he never again won the world title, he fought for nine more years, beating the likes of Gypsy Joe Harris, Tiger in a rematch, Ernie Lopez (twice), and Bennie Briscoe. He even challenged the great Carlos Monzon twice, lasting into the 14th round in '71 in Buenos Aries and dropping a decision in Monte Carlo two years later. In an unheard of move, he dropped back down to welterweight in '69 and dropped a 15-rounder to the splendid Jose Napoles. He finally retired at 39 years old in '77 after dropping three straight decisions, the last to future champion Alan Minter.

Griffith was too inconsistent at 160 to land among the upper echelon. But he makes the list because he twice beat another legend in Tiger, because he fought any middleweight willing to get in the ring with him, and because of his longevity, staying power, and versatility. He fought as a middleweight for 11 years, was stopped just twice—by Rubin Carter and Monzon—and at an advanced age compiled a record of 37-17-2 (5) against the best 160-pound fighters in the world. And seven of those losses came in his last three years. So he wasn't Sugar Ray Robinson. He was still a heck of a middleweight, and that's good enough for us.

14 DICK TIGER

61-17-3 (26)
World Champion 1963, 1965-'66

It doesn't do Tiger's memory justice that a lot of casual fans recall him just as the guy Bob Foster flattened to win the light heavyweight title. If they think hard, they'll remember that he beat Jose Torres for the 175-pound title, too. But ask them what he did at middleweight and they draw a blank. You almost can't blame them.

It didn't look early on as though Tiger would amount to much. After doing some good early work in Nigeria, he went to Liverpool, England, in 1955 and that year and the next he promptly dropped four in a row to guys you never heard of. It got a little better in '57; he lost only once in nine fights and he gradually refined the style and considerable skills that complemented his physical strength and durability. And he learned against the best middleweight contenders out there: Spider Webb, Randy Sandy, Rory Calhoun, a young Joey Giardello, Holley Mims, Victor Zalazar. He didn't win them all, but he won his share, splitting his two-bout series with Sandy, drawing with and losing to Calhoun, splitting with Giardello, and beating Mims, Webb, and Henry Hank. By the time he starched Gene "Ace" Armstrong in New York City and top-rated Florentino Fernandez in six rounds in Miami Beach in '62, he was ready for the big time, which presented itself in the form of Gene Fullmer.

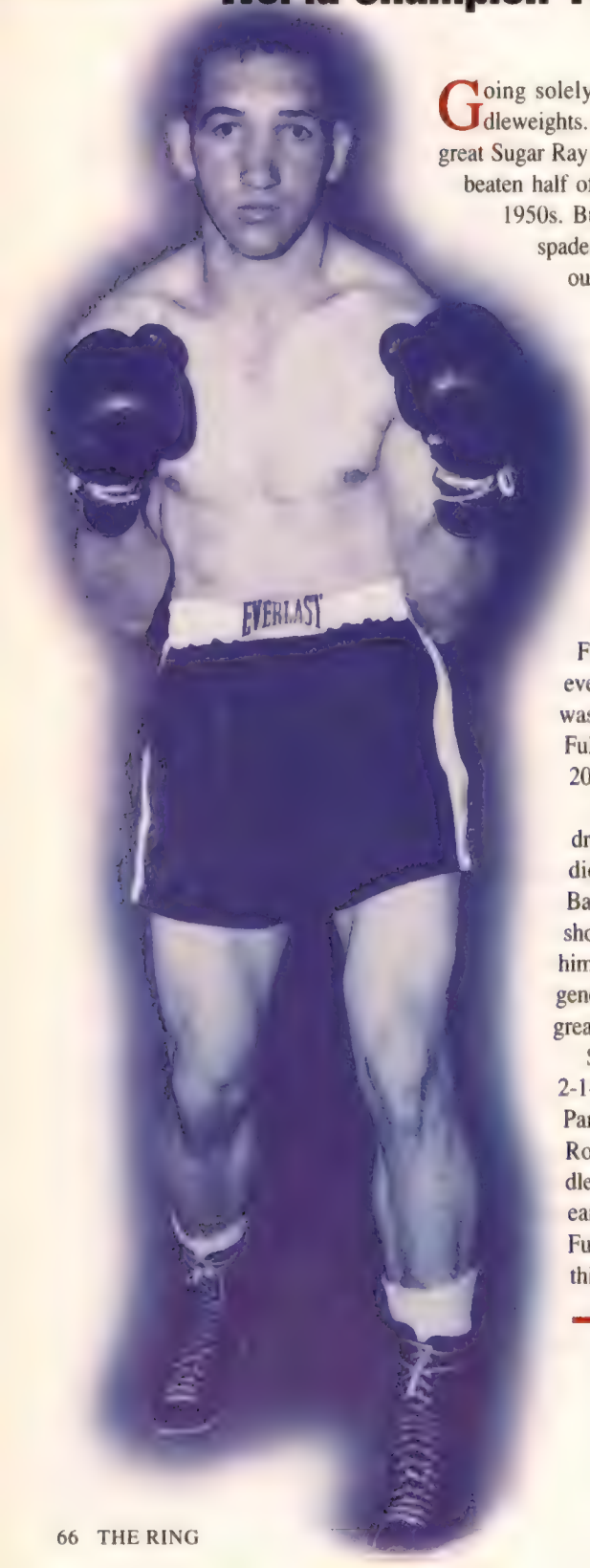
Fullmer was no easy mark; he had just beaten Sugar Ray Robinson for the final time, decisioned Fernandez, and brutalized poor welterweight champion Benny Paret for 10 rounds, no doubt contributing significantly to the tragic fate Paret suffered at the hands of Emile Griffith the following year. But Tiger was an immovable force, and he sliced open Fullmer's eyes and battered him. By the time the slugfest was halfway over, Fullmer knew he couldn't win that way and shifted gears, boxing and moving, but it was too late. Tiger beat him soundly to capture the WBA title. They fought twice more: to a draw the following November, and then Tiger removed any doubts as to his superiority with a resounding seventh-round stoppage that ended Fullmer's career. It netted Tiger universal recognition as the world champion.

Now here's what keeps Tiger out of the upper echelon of the great middleweights: He lost the title to Giardello the next time out, lost to Joey Archer, beat Rubin "Hurricane" Carter and then Giardello to regain the belt, then lost it to Griffith before moving up and dethroning Torres at 175. Inconsistency will do it every time.

Still, at 160 Tiger never was stopped, and in 81 fights, only Foster, probably the most explosive light heavyweight ever, was able to put him out. He beat two eventual Hall of Famers in Fullmer and Giardello, even if he never could handle Griffith, who whipped him once more in '70. To his credit, a 39-year-old Tiger did decision middleweight king Nino Benvenuti in a '69 non-title bout. Two years later he was broke from the civil uprising in his native Nigeria, and dead from liver cancer. He deserved better. From life and from those who remember him only as that guy stretched out at Foster's feet.

15 GENE FULLMER

55-6-3 (24)
World Champion 1957



Going solely on talent, Fullmer didn't belong in the ring with any of the great middleweights. Going solely on talent, he shouldn't have been allowed to share a cab with the great Sugar Ray Robinson, never mind a prize ring. Going solely on talent, he shouldn't have beaten half of the talented mix of middleweight contenders he ran roughshod over in the 1950s. But this is a game more about desire than talent, and desire Fullmer had in spades. He also had a chin made of the same stuff they fashion those black boxes out of and enough hard-earned endurance to outlast most ocean liners.

Fullmer wasn't a great hitter despite an obvious abundance of physical strength; he wore guys down with pressure, and then he pressured them after that, and if that didn't work, he tried pressuring them. Once in a while he'd use his head as a battering ram and his shoulders and elbows too, and if all of that failed, he punched as a last resort. Most of the time, the strategy worked.

It worked against Gil Turner and Rocky Castellani, for example. It worked against Ralph "Tiger" Jones and Chico Vejar, too, and Milo Savage and Spider Webb and Joe Miceli and Florentino Fernandez. And it worked, miracle of all miracles, against Robinson in their first fight, when after bulling Sugar Ray into the ropes and working him over for 15 rounds, Fullmer was the champ of all the world. You wondered how in the hell he took everything Robinson gave him on the way in all night, but somehow he did. It was working in their second match, at least for four-and-a-half rounds, until Fullmer walked into the best hook Robinson ever threw. He got his senses back 20 minutes later in the dressing room.

It worked again more or less in the third Robinson fight, which was called a draw, and it worked in the final in '61, when Robinson was all but gone but didn't know it yet. It worked twice against former welter bulldog Carmen Basilio, and when it didn't work, as was the case against Dick Tiger, Fullmer showed that he could box a little, too. Not well enough to beat Tiger, who retired him in '63, but well enough all the same. A lot of folks thought Fullmer was genetically incapable of circling or jabbing from the outside. Not so. He wasn't great at it, but he could do it.

Some will be put off by Fullmer's placement outside the top 10. Hell, he was 2-1-1 against the best fighter in the history of fighting and beat Basilio, Benny Paret, and all those good, sturdy middleweight contenders. All true. But the Robinson he beat in '57 was not the best Robinson, or even the best middleweight Robinson. That Robinson was busy whipping Jake LaMotta six years earlier. Basilio and Paret? Both great welterweights; not great middleweights. Fullmer is in the Hall of Fame and deservedly so. It's where he belongs. So is this.

16 RODRIGO VALDES

63-8-2 (41)

WBC Champion 1974-'76, World Champion 1977-'78

Sometimes, a fighter has in him what it takes to be great. He has the punch, he has the skills, he has the heart and desire, and all the other stuff that gets guys into the Hall of Fame and high onto lists like this one. But something holds him back. Women maybe, or the thirst, or gambling, or some other vice. Sometimes it's none of those things. Sometimes he just has the misfortune of having shared his era with someone who also had what it took to be great and just put it all together better.

Maybe Valdes could have been higher on this list. He had the tools. He certainly had the punch, and if you don't believe us, ask Bobby Cassidy Sr., a tough, hard-headed New York middleweight Valdes stopped in seven rounds in 1971. Ask Doc Holliday, whom he knocked out in four, or Kim Booker, who went in five. Look up top-rated Gratien Tonna, who lasted into the 11th, or slick Vinnie Curto, who managed to last the whole 10 rounds. And if none of those guys are available, get in touch with "Baaaad Bennie" Briscoe, that beloved old Philadelphia warrior and top middleweight contender who hung tough with every 160-pound fighter of the '70s. Valdes beat him three times, once by knockout. Any of those guys will tell you: Valdes was the goods. And he might have had it in him to become even greater than he did.

So what held Valdes back? Carlos Monzon, the dominant middleweight who fought in the same era. Valdes had his chance against him. The WBC stripped Monzon in '74 for not facing Valdes, so he and Briscoe fought for the vacant title. The two slugged away at one another until Briscoe finally wilted in the seventh, and Valdes then banged out four quick defenses, setting up the unification match with Monzon. But there is a reason Monzon is close to the top of this list and Valdes is not. The Argentine was at his impenetrable best that night in Monte Carlo and walked away with a clear-cut unanimous decision win.

Valdes returned to Cartagena and Barranquilla, where he began his career and fought primarily for the first five or six years, and scored a couple of quick knockouts before signing for the rematch with Monzon, who was 34 at this point and as ready as he ever was to be taken. They met in Monte Carlo, and it started well enough for Valdes when he dropped Monzon in the second with a long right hand. It was the first time the champion had been floored in 13 years. Valdes led on the cards before Monzon rallied over the second half of the fight and took the decision again, closer than the last time, but this ain't horse shoes.

Valdes had enough left to beat Briscoe again (this time on a razor-thin decision) and claim the title after Monzon retired. But it seemed as though he lost everything with his tormentor out of the picture. The awkward and utterly forgettable Hugo Corro decisioned and dethroned him in his first defense and beat him again seven months later. Maybe Valdes wouldn't have been an all-time great even without Monzon around. Maybe it was Monzon's presence that drove him to the success he had. Maybe Monzon wasn't his vice after all. Maybe he was Valdes' strength.

17 BOB FITZSIMMONS

40-11 (32) with 10 no-decisions, 1 no-contest
World Champion 1891-'97

Placing "Ruby Robert" anywhere but among the top three or four all-time middleweight greats will drive the hardcore old-timers bonkers. You know who we're talking about: the guys who think John L. Sullivan could have beaten Ali and Frazier on the same night and had enough left over to decision Joe Louis. Those guys.

Certainly, Fitzsimmons' place in history will always be assured. He was boxing's first triple-crown champion, having won the middleweight, light heavyweight, and heavyweight crowns, the light heavyweight title when he was 40. Hell, the guy fought competitively until he was 50, almost 100 years before George Foreman first told us middle age wasn't a death sentence. But remember, this is about rewarding fighters who got business done at middleweight, so we're not overly interested in what Fitz did after abandoning the 160-pound weight class.

Having said that, Fitzsimmons still ranks among the top 20 middleweights ever. First, it was the weight he fought at for the bulk of his career, or from 1883 through 1895, and the weight at which he compiled a pretty sound record of 30-4 (22) with 6 no-decisions against the world's best. It's true that he's better known for knocking out Jim Corbett for the heavyweight title—while weighing all of 167 pounds no less—but he was far less active at heavyweight, even when you consider he officially defended the middleweight belt all of once, that a second-round stoppage of Dan Creedon.

Give the middleweight Fitzsimmons credit too for stopping the laudable Jack Dempsey—"The Nonpareil," not "The Manassa Mauler"—to claim the belt in New Orleans in 1891. Dempsey had been a splendid champion, held the title for seven years, and was considered one of the best of his day when Fitzsimmons annihilated him, dropping him 13 times before finally knocking him cold in the 13th. Then came eight straight knockout wins against the likes of Peter Maher, James Farrell, Joe Godfrey, Millard Zender, and Jack Warner. Some of those guys were middleweights, some heavyweights, and some in between, but Fitz rarely weighed more than 160 or so in those days anyway, so give him another few points for being a middleweight who consistently knocked over bigger guys.

Don't hold it against old Fitz that his legs were so skinny the great John L. himself called him a "fighting machine on stilts." Don't hold it against him either that he looked an awful lot like a pelican. Pelicans can get pretty nasty when they're cornered, we hear, and if you consider Fitzsimmons an all-time great, and you should, you have to consider him an all-time middleweight great. He didn't do much at heavy outside of paralyzing Corbett, and his only defense at light heavy was a no-decision against Philadelphia Jack O'Brien. So give the guy his due, but do it at middleweight, because 105 years ago no one was better.

18 TOMMY RYAN

86-3-6 (68) with 4 no-decisions, 6 no-contests
World Champion 1898-1907

Fighters' records can be a funny thing. Wins appear and disappear, losses are recorded and then vanish. And we're not talking just about South American flyweights who are barely above .500 and then zoom, mysteriously, to the top of the IBF ratings. The grapevine said Julio Cesar Chavez had a loss disappear from his resume when he started getting exposure, and some people swore Harry Greb wasn't the only guy to beat Gene Tunney. But those who said it are all dead now and not talking, so Tunney's near-perfect record remains intact for perpetuity.

There are more versions of how long Ryan's title reign lasted that there are fighters who have sued Don King. Some sources say it went just four years, from 1898-1902. Others say he held it until '04. His record shows that he won the middleweight crown when he knocked out Jack Bonner in October '98 and never lost it in the ring, never relinquished it, and retired, as the champion, after a six-round exhibition against Battling Nelson in South Bend, Indiana, in '07. That would make his reign just under 10 years long, almost three years longer than that tallied by Carlos Monzon, who is believed by most to be the division record-holder in this regard.

Ultimately, the quibble is irrelevant because Ryan, whether he officially—that's an important word—held the title for two years, four years, or 10 years, was a middleweight light years ahead of his time and probably the second best of his era, right behind Bob Fitzsimmons. Plus, we're talking about the best 160-pounders ever, not record-holders, and Ryan easily qualifies as one of the former regardless of the length of his reign.

There is no debate that Ryan claimed the crown when he stopped Bonner in '98. There is no debate that in the following year he tallied nine wins, six by knockout, or that over the next four years, from '00 to '03, he went 23-2-1 with 19 knockouts, at one point scoring 10 stoppages in a row. (One of the two losses was by disqualification.) Nor is there any debate that in '95, he blew away in three rounds and retired former middleweight king Jack Dempsey, "The Nonpareil," the very same one it took Fitzsimmons 13 rounds to dispatch four years earlier.

Ryan cleaned out the division left behind when Fitzsimmons went chasing after Jim Corbett. No contender was spared. Not Frank Craig or Tommy West, not Johnny Gorman or Kid Carter, not Billy Stift or Cyclone Kelly. Ryan defended the title just four times between '98 and '03, but had 39 fights. He won 33 of them; three were no-decisions, and one was a draw. Do the math and look again at his overall record, which never has been in dispute. The guy had 95 bouts that didn't end in no-decisions or no-contests. Three times the other guy's hand was raised. We don't care if he was champ for 20 minutes. Records like Ryan's don't happen by accident.

19 JOEY GIARDELLO

100-25-7 (32) with 1 no-decision
World Champion 1963-'65

It took Giardello a long, long time to become a champion—123 fights and 15 years to be exact. He was 33 already when he outsmarted Dick Tiger over 15 rounds in Atlantic City in 1963. It took so long not because he'd been frozen out of the title picture by evil forces, like Charlie Burley had and Jake LaMotta years before. It was because every time he put together a good streak and was on the verge of finally getting his shot, he blew it. He screwed up and lost fights he wasn't supposed to, and it hurt him. He wasn't consistent.

It wasn't as though Giardello wasn't used to losing. In '50, his third year as a pro, he lost three times, twice by knockout. The following year he dropped four. In '52 he drew three straight times, put together five wins, then lost to Joey Giambra, who he'd beaten a month before. No consistency. He lost twice to Billy Graham, though some cockeyed judges and the State Supreme Court said otherwise, and then decisioned the talented Harold Green. A loss to Johnny Saxton, a win over Tiger Jones. Nine wins in a row, then back-to-back losses to Charlie Cotton. Nine wins in a row—over such solid fighters as Rory Calhoun, Chico Vejar, Jones again, and Franz Szuzina—then another loss to Giambra, a knockout loss to Spider Webb, and a decision loss to Jones. Enough already. You get the picture.

Giardello split a pair of 10-rounders with Tiger in '59, and Gene Fullmer, the NBA champ, gave him a shot. The verdict? What else but a draw, which Giardello followed up with a kayo win and then three straight decision losses. Win some, lose some. A decision over the well-done Sugar Ray Robinson two years later got him the shot at Tiger. Everyone figured he was done by then himself, but he pulled it off, and people started wondering how long it would be before he lost it. Less than two years. A defense against Rubin Carter—which the majority of the press had him winning, for the record—and Tiger took it away from him again. But for all his inconsistency, Giardello won a lot more than he lost against an exceptionally deep middleweight division. And, he did it with style. That part, at least, was guaranteed.

20 JACK DEMPSEY

50-3-9 (26) with 3 no-contests
World Champion 1884-'91

Some guys are so good at what they do that it ends up hurting them. They become heroes to others and sooner or later a guy comes along who is pretty good, too, and to honor his hero, he takes his name. If the second guy turns out to be especially good, then over time people just forget about the first guy.

It's what happened with Jersey Joe Walcott (a.k.a. Arnold Cream). We'll bet you knew about him before you did his hero, "Barbados" Joe Walcott, even though the original was the more accomplished fighter. We'll bet, too, that you know more about William Harrison Dempsey than you do about "The Nonpareil," who may be the only fighter in history whose nickname is not just a nickname, but a required piece of nomenclature. Without it suffixed to his name and with no other information supplied, one would be unable to discern him from the more famous "Manassa Mauler."

Everything else being equal, then, it would have worked out better for The Nonpareil had he kept his given name: John Kelly. There is no John Kelly in boxing's pantheon, so, unburdened of the need to worry over the precise meaning of the wretchedly ever-present "Nonpareil" tag (it means "without equal"), or its pronunciation, we'd have had more time to concentrate on Dempsey's noteworthy accomplishments, which are impressive in number.

Dempsey didn't lose until his 60th fight. It's true that there were a few no-contests along the way and a number of draws, but the guy wasn't beaten until he was into his seventh year as a pro. How many of the great middleweights can say that? There's more: That loss was to George LaBlanche. Dempsey had stopped LaBlanche three years earlier in a title defense. In the rematch, Dempsey was in charge until LaBlanche landed an illegal "pivot punch," a sort of backhand, and knocked out Dempsey in the 32nd round. In an odd concession to the loose regulations of the day, the knockout was allowed to stand, but Dempsey retained the middleweight title.

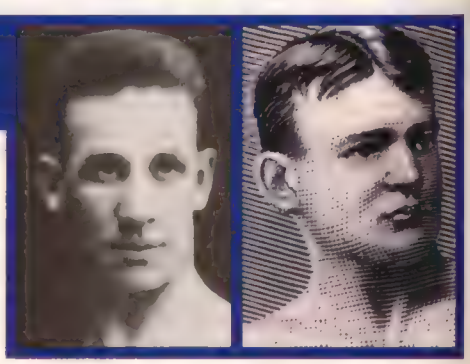
Speaking of the title, Dempsey was the champ for 6½ years. It's true that he made just four successful defenses during that reign, but hell, that's just one fewer than his more famous heavyweight counterpart made over a seven-year reign a generation later. That's the way it worked then. It's as important to know that over that lengthy reign, The Nonpareil fought a total of 40 non-title fights. Aside from the controversial LaBlanche loss, up until the point when the great Bob Fitzsimmons brutalized him to take the title in 13 rounds in 1891, Dempsey had never been beaten. William Harrison Dempsey picked a good fighter to be his hero. ■

THE 20 GREATEST MIDDLEWEIGHT TITLE FIGHTS OF ALL-TIME

By Gavin Evans

TOMMY RYAN KO 17 TOMMY WEST

Louisville, Kentucky, March 4, 1901



Ryan (left) vs. West was a bloody affair

When old-timers spoke of Tommy Ryan, their words took on a misty glow. RING founder Nat Fleischer rated Ryan the second greatest middleweight of all-time (although his peak weight was 142 pounds) and called him "the ideal boxer." Jim Jeffries said that no man "had the speed of Ryan, the cleverness of Ryan, the hitting power of Ryan, his amazing stamina, his superb courage, and his uncanny brain."

West, 30, was known as merely a tough brawler who liked to work up close. He stood 5'5", two inches less than the 30-year-old Ryan.

They'd met twice before, in 1898—a six-round no-decision and a 14th-round stoppage for Ryan, but their third and final fight was later described as the "bloodiest battle ever seen in the South."

West smashed his head into the champion's mouth in round four, breaking one of his teeth. Ryan turned to referee Tim Hurst, complaining: "What do you call that, Tim?" Hurst replied: "You've got a head too, haven't you, Tommy."

Ryan got the message, splitting West's lips and knocking out several teeth with a blatant butt in the fifth. And he didn't stop there. As promoter Jack Curley observed: "He ripped West's mouth with his left wrist and forearm whenever they were at close quarters. The floor of the ring was wet with their blood, and club employees mopped it up between rounds."

Eventually, Ryan's superior skills and power prevailed, and Hurst stopped the fight in round 17.

STANLEY KETCHEL W 20 BILLY PAPKE

Colma, California, July 5, 1909

Ketchel's power got him past Papke

This was one of the great rivalries of early-20th century boxing. Ketchel defended his title with a 10-round decision over Papke in June 1908. Three months later, Papke stopped Ketchel in 12 (after hitting him in the throat when they were supposed to be shaking hands), but Ketchel, "The Michigan Assassin," gained revenge two months on, knocking out "The Illinois Thunderbolt" in 11. After an eight-month break from one another (filled with four fights for Ketchel and three for Papke), they were at it again for one last time. They were both 22 and both stood 5'9."

Their fourth fight, contested in a rainstorm, was an intense, grueling affair, and is generally regarded as the best fight of the series. Watched on film today, it seems frustratingly filled with clinches, wrestling, pushing, and pulling, but that was standard stuff in 1909, and the crowd loved it. Papke, with his old-fashioned, hands-down, lean-back style, liked to dig in one or two heavy hooks to the body before grabbing. Ketchel, upright and open, also liked to hold between heavy-handed bursts of power.

After two close opening rounds, Papke shaded the next three with his body attack, but Ketchel, who was more aggressive, won rounds six to eight, and they shared the ninth.

By the later rounds, Ketchel's edge in power and strength began to tell. He drove Papke back, throwing short punches and then leaning on his rival in the clinches. Ketchel bossed the last three rounds and won a unanimous decision.

HARRY GREB W 15 MICKEY WALKER

New York, New York, July 2, 1925

Greb (left) stung Walker from "impossible angles"

Greb, whom many still rate as the greatest middleweight of them all, was permanently blinded in one eye against Kid Norfolk in 1921, but went on to outfight Gene Tunney for the U.S. light heavyweight title and then win the world middleweight title. Still, at the age of 31 and after 284 fights (six losses), he was well past his best. Welterweight champion Walker, almost 24, was reaching his peak after 86 fights (six losses).

Walker, the 5'7", 152-pound "Toy Bulldog," clearly won the first three rounds with his heavy bodypunching. Walker consolidated his lead in the fifth with a huge hook to Greb's mouth that knocked out one of his teeth. But from then on, the 5'8", 158-pound "Human Windmill" took over, outworking his challenger and catching him frequently with long, hard rights to the jaw.

"Greb could hit from impossible angles," Walker marveled later. "I still don't know how he did it, but once he hit me in the mouth while his hands faced in the opposite direction."

In the 10th, Greb began smothering Walker, pushing him around and dominating up-close. After taking a battering in the 13th, Walker was caught with a big overhand right to the jaw in round 14, and went reeling backward to his own corner. Greb pummeled him, and only the ropes kept Walker up. Walker managed to fight back in the last round, but he ended up with a badly swollen face, bleeding profusely from the mouth, nose, and right eye. There was no disputing the unanimous decision.

TONY ZALE KO 6 ROCKY GRAZIANO

New York, New York, September 27, 1946

Zale endured heavy pounding to drop Graziano

During four years of war service, Zale's world middleweight title was kept on ice. When he returned for his first defense against the hard-hitting, foul-fighting Graziano, it was thought he was ready for the taking. The 24-year-old New Yorker had won eight in a row, seven on knockouts, and was installed as an 11-5 favorite over the 33-year-old Zale.

The 5'8", 160-pound champion, who was an inch taller and six pounds heavier, got in early, dropping Graziano with a left hook. Late in round two, Zale went down from a series of rights before the bell came to his rescue. Over the next three rounds, "The Man Of Steel" had to absorb a steady succession of heavy right hand bombs and left hooks, but he kept on pounding the body, gradually weakening Rocky's resistance.

Both men were battered and tired coming out for round six, but just when Zale looked like he might be wilting, he spotted an opening and whipped in a paralyzing right to the solar plexus. Graziano went down, but made it up again. This time, Zale belted him with a left hook to the jaw, and referee Ruby Goldstein counted him out when he was halfway up. Graziano wanted to continue fighting and had to be held back. Zale, who as AP reported at the time "looked like a man who had been in hand-to-hand combat with a buzzsaw," had to be propped up by his seconds as he was paraded around the ring.

ROCKY GRAZIANO KO 6 TONY ZALE

Chicago, Illinois, July 16, 1947

Graziano reversed the roles and overcame Zale

In the 10 months since their first war, Zale had packed in five knockouts, while Graziano's prime opponent had been the New York State Athletic Commission, which suspended his license for failing to report a bribe. Zale's only loss in his last 21 fights had come on points against heavyweight contender Billy Conn.

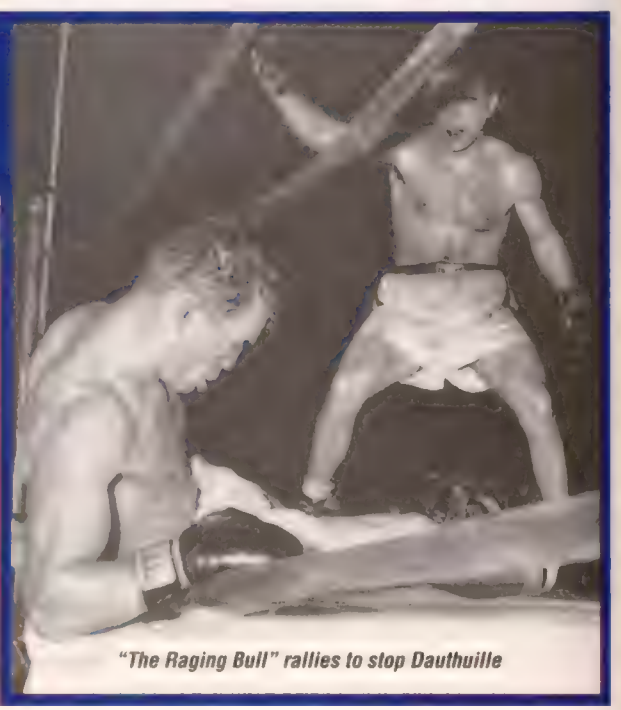
In the early rounds, the 34-year-old, 159-pound Zale seemed set for a repeat victory. His heavy punches caused a severe swelling around Graziano's right eye in the first round and he scored a knockdown in the third. But the 155-pound challenger kept on firing those heavy rights, and by the end of round five, he was firmly back in contention, even though his left eye was bleeding heavily and his right almost closed.

The temperature in the ring was almost 100 degrees, and this time it was Graziano who emerged stronger. Midway through round six, he rallied, landing a series of massive rights to drop the hard man from Gary, Indiana. The crowd-pleasing New Yorker then drove him to the ropes and kept on pounding until the fight was stopped. Like their 1946 fight, this one was voted THE RING's Fight of the Year.

Years later Graziano wrote: "This was no boxing match. It was war and if there wasn't a referee, the two of us would have wound up dead." A year later, they fought a rubber match, with Zale regaining his title on a one-sided third-round knockout.

JAKE LaMOTTA KO 15 LAURENT DAUTHUILLE

Detroit, Michigan, September 13, 1950



"The Raging Bull" rallies to stop Dauthuille

These two first met in Montreal 19 months earlier, with Dauthuille winning on points. Four months later, LaMotta won the world title from Marcel Cerdan.

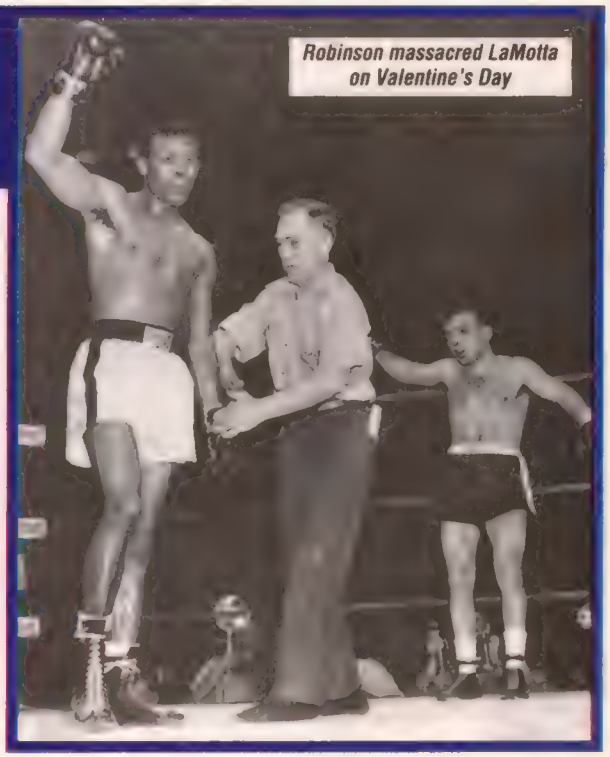
The 28-year-old "Raging Bull" was an inconsistent fighter, but at his best, his strength, chin, and underrated skill made him a hard man to beat. The 26-year-old Dauthuille was more of jab-and-move boxer, but he was also a decent puncher, having won his four previous bouts via knockout.

For 14 rounds, Dauthuille was too quick and slick for the lethargic LaMotta, who'd been the full 15 with Tiberio Mitri only two months earlier. Entering the final round, the 5'8" Italian-American was behind by margins of eight, four, and two points, and for the first two minutes, it looked like he might not make it to the end. LaMotta appeared exhausted, covering up on the ropes.

As the champ's body began to sag, the Frenchman moved in and opened up. Suddenly, "The Bronx Bull" exploded. Dauthuille realized too late his adversary had been playing possum, and was caught by surprise by a couple of swinging hooks. He backpedaled hastily, but he was tired and hurt, and LaMotta was on top of him, launching a furious onslaught that lasted 25 seconds, finishing with two huge left hooks that dropped Dauthuille and almost knocked him through the ropes. With 13 seconds to go in the fight, Dauthuille made it to his feet—half a second too late.

RAY ROBINSON KO 13 JAKE LaMOTTA

Chicago, Illinois, February 14, 1951



Robinson massacred LaMotta on Valentine's Day

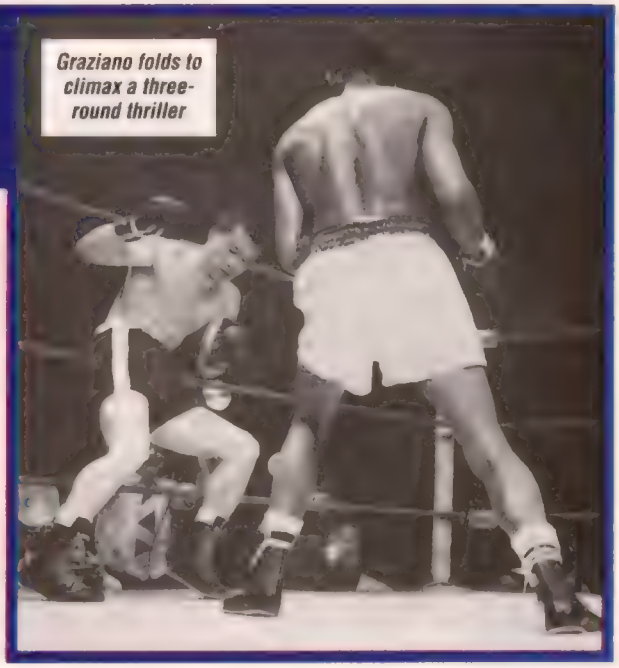
These two fought five times before, all close, with Robinson winning four and LaMotta one. Two things had changed: First, the weight difference in LaMotta's favor had ranged between nine and 16 pounds in the previous five fights, but this time it was 4½ pounds. Second, neither were champions in those five bouts, but this time they were fighting for LaMotta's middleweight title over 15 rounds.

"The Bronx Bull" charged, intent on using his significant edge in strength while working the body, as Robinson tried to keep the fight at long range, using his quick jab and stinging counters to both head and body. For 10 rounds, it was a fairly even fight, but in the 11th, it changed. LaMotta, who had dropped Robinson twice in their early bouts, cornered Sugar Ray for 14 seconds, but this time he soaked it up and came firing back, battering LaMotta first with an eight-punch combination and then with six more hard, accurate blows.

Sugar Ray completely dominated round 12 and then subjected the weight-drained middleweight champion to a sustained battering in the 13th. He started his final assault with a cracking right uppercut, followed by three big left hooks. LaMotta, who only took one count in his entire, 106-fight career, wobbled, but stayed on his feet as Robinson landed a barrage of 18 unanswered bombs. Finally, at 2:04 of the round, "The St. Valentine's Massacre" came to an end as referee Frank Sikora rescued the defenseless champion.

RAY ROBINSON KO 3 ROCKY GRAZIANO

Chicago, Illinois, April 16, 1952



Graziano folds to climax a three-round thriller

For four years, Graziano had been rebuilding after losing his world title. Graziano, 30, was unbeaten in his last 21 fights. Robinson, also 30, was only on a two-fight winning streak, but in all, he had only been beaten twice in 135 fights. This was his second defense of the title he regained from Randy Turpin.

The 5'7" Graziano was 2½ pounds heavier at 159—but four inches shorter, and the gap seemed even greater because he fought out of a crouch, as he tried to bob and weave his way past Sugar Ray's controlling left jab.

The fight suddenly exploded in round three. Robinson came forward, driving Graziano into the ropes with a seven-punch combination, but left himself open and was caught flush on the chin with a big right hand. He went down, but was up at the count of two. Referee Tommy Gilmore wiped his gloves, and Robinson jabbed in retreat for a few seconds, then slipped another big right, and came back with his own stiff right cross. Robinson then stepped in with a four-punch combination, starting with a left hook and ending with a perfectly placed and timed short right cross to the jaw that sent the Italian-American's gumshield flying.

Graziano went down heavily and flexed his right leg a few times to try to get it to work, but to no avail. He then grabbed the ropes, but could not pull himself up in time and was counted out.

CARL OLSON W 15 KID GAVILAN

Chicago, Illinois, April 2, 1954

Gavilan couldn't beat Bobo with the bolo

Put in a middleweight at the peak of his powers against a welterweight a little past his best and you know what to expect. But when the smaller man is one of the all-time greats, it still makes for an intriguing, competitive, possibly even classic encounter.

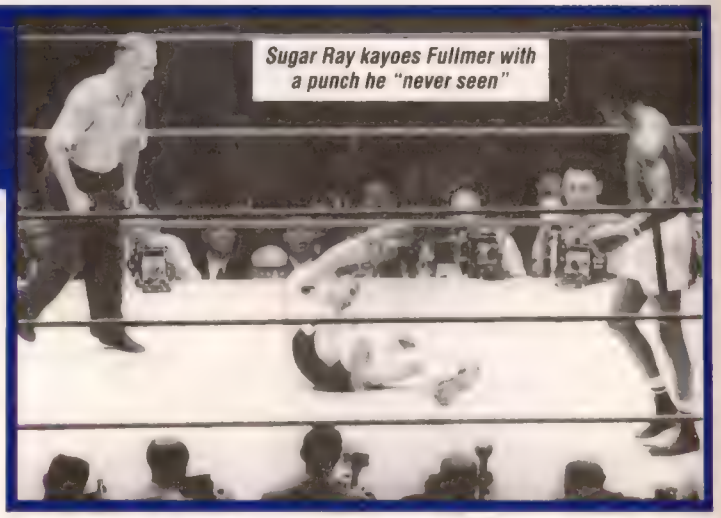
The 28-year-old Gavilan was beginning to slow down, but he was still fast, elusive, and tenacious. The 25-year-old Olson, on the other hand, was in the midst of a 21-fight winning streak and had reached his prime. At 5'10", they were both the same height, but the 159-pound middleweight champion regularly fought at light heavyweight and by fight time was more than 10 pounds heavier. The welterweight champion, who started his career at bantamweight, weighed in fully clothed at 155.

"The Hawk" was far quicker, and tried his utmost to move in and out, landing dazzling combinations, including his famed bolo punch (a sweeping uppercut, usually to the body). But "Bobo" was no slouch when it came to boxing skill. He knew how to cut off the ring and work on the inside.

He made his usual slow start, but once he found his rhythm, he bulled Gavilan around the ring, banging away at the body and smothering the flurries that came his way. It was a case of choosing between the Cuban's hand speed and the Hawaiian's strength and power. Several rounds were close and there were no knockdowns, but in the end Olson deservedly emerged with a majority decision (144-144, 147-141, 147-139).

RAY ROBINSON KO 5 GENE FULLMER

Chicago, Illinois, May 1, 1957



Sugar Ray kayoes Fullmer with a punch he "never seen"

The first time around, Fullmer not only dominated Robinson with his youth, strength, and work rate, he knocked him out of the ring. Over the next six weeks, he won two 10-rounders before giving himself a 10-week break. Fullmer was 25. Robinson was two days short of 36.

Sugar Ray seemed far sharper this time than in the first meeting, moving on his toes, landing quick jabs and hooks, and tying up Fullmer when he came too close. But the world champion kept pressing, forcing the veteran backward, and by round five it was building into a close and intriguing contest.

The 5'11" Robinson was boxing in retreat, while the 5'8" Fullmer was trying to cut off the ring and land his wide, hard hooks. After a clinch, Robinson jabbed and Fullmer charged. Sugar Ray stepped in with a hard right to the short ribs and slipped away, but the champion trundled on, with his right lowered, ready to fire. Robinson spotted a gap and immediately shot out a low left hook that caught the Utah Mormon on the edge of his chin as he was advancing.

Fullmer's head twisted from the impact, and he collapsed. Still in a daze, he tried to push himself up with his knees and hands, but crumpled for a second time, landing on his face. Fullmer was counted out by referee Frank Sikora at the 1:27 mark. "He hit me with this left hook I never seen, heard, or felt," Fullmer explained.

CARMEN BASILIO W 15 RAY ROBINSON

New York, New York, September 23, 1957

Basilio's tenacity gave Robinson fits

The world welterweight champion didn't look like much compared to the great Robinson—a small (5'6", 153 pounds) slugger with an unimposing record of 51-12-7 (25). But if you looked closer, it was clear Basilio was improving all the time. He'd lost only two of his last 28, a split decision against Kid Gavilan and an outrageous verdict against the mob-backed Johnny Saxton, which he twice reversed. Basilio was just reaching his peak at the age of 30, even if welterweight was his more natural division.

Basilio showed a tenacity that gave Robinson fits. Sugar Ray would jab and move, but nothing would discourage the little man. He pressed forward relentlessly, firing non-stop whenever he came close. For 10 rounds, it was a hard, even fight, and then it got even better. Basilio's head was being jolted back with the jab until he cornered the 36-year-old Robinson and pounded him for 20 seconds of round 11 with hooks and uppercuts to both head and body. But in the 12th, it was Robinson's turn—a stream of jabs followed by a cracking right, a jolting hook, and a sustained barrage.

In round 13, Basilio broke through the guard of the tiring champion and hooked away at his ribs until Robinson landed a huge hook late in the round followed by another rally. But it was the welterweight champion who closed the fight stronger, nicking the final rounds to take a split decision. The referee, Al Beri, scored it nine rounds to six for Robinson, but the judges made it 9-5-1 and 8-6-1 for Basilio.

GENE FULLMER KO 14 CARMEN BASILIO

San Francisco, California, August 28, 1959

Fullmer bashes Basilio en route to regaining title

These two had much in common: Both were former world middleweight champions, both had won and lost their titles against Sugar Ray Robinson, and most importantly, both were two-fisted brawlers who preferred to forget about the niceties. Fullmer had won nine in a row in the 27 months since losing his crown. Basilio had picked up two stoppages in the 17 months since Robinson outpointed him.

The difference was that Fullmer was four years younger, three pounds heavier, and nearly two inches taller. He also seemed to have a slight edge in strength and power. In the early rounds, it was the busier Basilio who was pressing the action, throwing plenty of short hooks as he went toe-to-toe at short range. But from the sixth round on, Fullmer began to edge ahead slightly, his hooks a little heavier than Basilio's.

Coming into round 14, it was still a close, intense war that looked set to go to the cards, but that suddenly changed. Fullmer, who had scored only one stoppage in his last 13 fights, rammed in a stiff jab and followed it with a heavy right cross that caught the tiring Basilio by surprise. He wobbled badly and fell into the ropes, where the bigger man blasted away with seven unanswered punches, including two huge left hooks that landed flush. Basilio was badly dazed and referee Jack Downey stepped in to end what had become THE RING's Fight of the Year.

DICK TIGER W 15 GENE FULLMER

San Francisco, California, October 23, 1962

Tiger tamed Fullmer by boxing instead of brawling

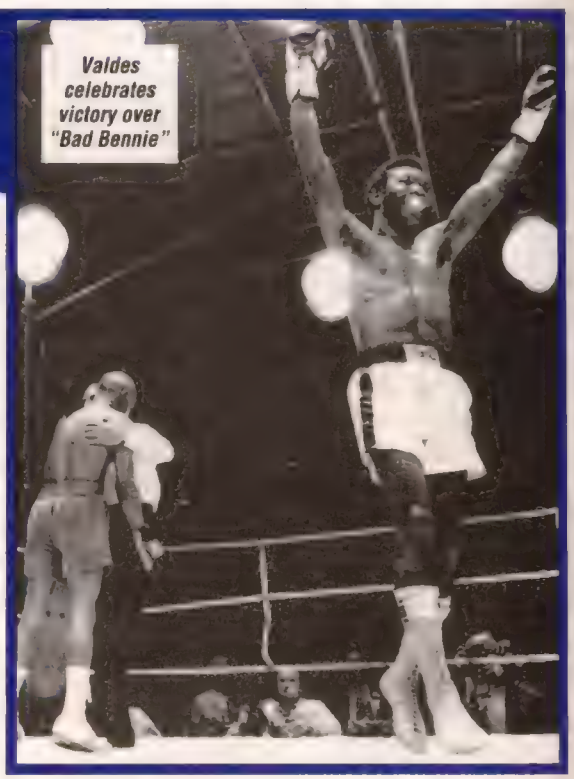
Fullmer had escaped with two gift draws and one generous split decision during his three years as NBA world middleweight titlist. But the tough, aggressive Tiger did not seem the kind of boxer to trouble him. Ten months after knocking out welterweight champion Benny Paret, Fullmer felt rested and ready to go to war with the 33-year-old Tiger, who arrived with a reputation for relishing a tear-up.

But the 31-year-old Fullmer was in for a surprise. First, the Biafran Nigerian proved cuter than expected, fighting behind his high guard, slipping punches, and making good use of his persistent jab. Second, he hit harder than his record (20 knockouts in 60 fights) suggested, ripping in big hooks whenever Fullmer was in range. Third, he proved to be even stronger than Fullmer himself, driving the champion back and taking his punches without blinking. Fullmer's non-stop aggression kept him in the fight, but he could not match Tiger's superior boxing skill.

Coming into the last round, Fullmer's face was a mess of welts and bruises. He knew he was behind and went all-out for a knockout, but Tiger boxed with cool confidence, hooking off that solid jab and avoiding the incoming bombs. At the final bell, they hugged in exhausted appreciation of each other's effort. The scores were 10-1-4, 9-5-1, and 7-5-3, all for Tiger. Four months later, Fullmer was fortunate to get a draw with the man who deposed him, but after another six months, he retired in his corner after a seven-round Tiger mauling.

RODRIGO VALDES KO 7 BENNIE BRISCOE

Monte Carlo, Monaco, May 25, 1974



Valdes celebrates victory over "Bad Bennie"

When world middleweight champion Carlos Monzon failed to defend his title against top challenger Valdes, the WBC declared the title vacant and offered Philadelphia's Bennie Briscoe the chance to avenge a close points loss to his Colombian rival, suffered eight months earlier.

The shaven-headed, 31-year-old, 157-pound Briscoe was only a bit past his formidable peak. Besides losing to Valdes, his only other loss in the previous two years came on points against Monzon, whom he'd previously held to what could generously be called an Argentinean draw. "Bad Bennie" attacked from the start, driving back his 27-year-old, 157-pound rival and swamping him with punches. Both men were big hitters, but Briscoe's aggression seemed the decisive factor, and after six rounds, he was well ahead.

In round seven, however, Valdes turned it all around with a sudden and decisive finality. He followed a jab with a short right cross that exploded on Briscoe's hard chin, and then for good measure, landed a farewell left hook. The Philadelphia hardman was known for his resilience, having gone 25 rounds with Monzon without going down, but this time he fell heavily and struggled up drunkenly at the count of eight. The British referee, Harry Gibbs, took one look and waved it off. After Monzon's retirement, they fought for a third time—for the vacant world title—with Valdes taking a fairly close, unanimous decision.

CARLOS MONZON W 15 RODRIGO VALDES

Monte Carlo, Monaco, July 30, 1977

Monzon cracks Valdes with a right

Thirteen months had passed since Monzon re-unified the world title by beating Valdes on a close decision. He had not fought in that time, his smoking, drinking, carousing lifestyle was hardly conducive for peak fitness, and he was nearly 35 years old. Monzon was also cut in training, postponing the fight by three weeks. Valdes was at his peak after 66 fights (38 stoppages and just five losses) and had fought twice in the interim.

The early rounds belonged to the 30-year-old Colombian, who dropped Monzon with a cracking right cross to the head in round two. But the Argentinean had a granite chin and fought back hard from rounds four to six, neglecting his jab, but countering well by using lead right crosses.

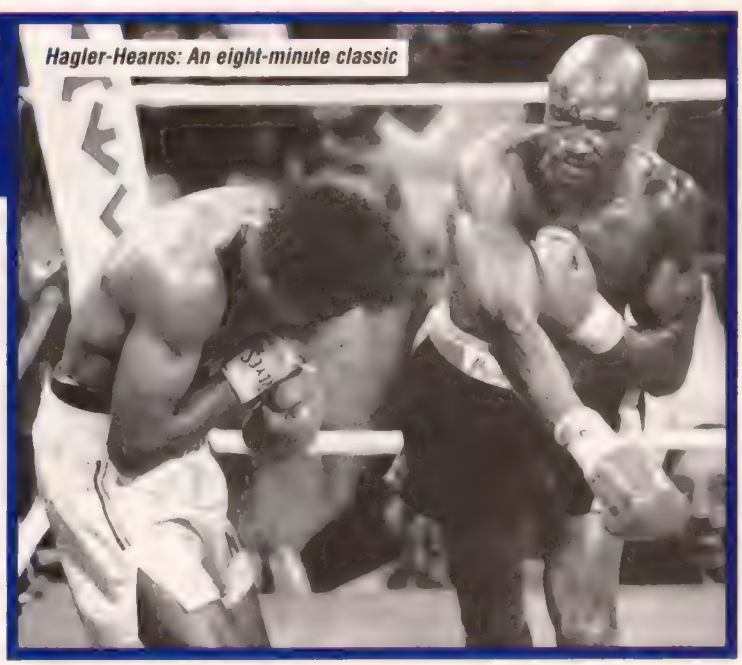
Late in round seven, it was the 5'9" Valdes' turn to take the fight to the 6' champion, and he sustained his rally through round eight.

Valdes seemed to be on top after nine, but in the 10th his right eye began to swell and his left was cut, which meant he was open to the right cross. However, Monzon's fragile right hand was damaged late in the round, and from then-on he had to use it more sparingly. Still, with Valdes' vision obscured, Monzon was safe and emerged with another close but clear decision, 145-143, 147-144, and 146-141.

"I think I showed everyone I'm one of the great ones," Monzon said afterward, announcing his retirement with a record of 87-3-9 (59) with 1 no-contest.

MARVIN HAGLER KO 3 THOMAS HEARNS

Las Vegas, Nevada, April 15, 1985



Hagler-Hearns: An eight-minute classic

There was huge anticipation for months before the event. The 5'9" Hagler, who was almost 31, was unbeaten in his last 35 fights, making his 11th title defense. The 6'1" Hearns was 26.

"The Hitman" trained to jab and move. "My plan was to give him a boxing lesson," he said. But his trainer, Emanuel Steward, said an unnecessary massage forced a change of plan. "My legs felt weak, so I said I have to go out there to try and knock him out as fast as I can," said Hearns. He detonated his right, landing it on top of Hagler's head. The champ shuddered, but stayed erect. Hearns' hand broke.

They continued to swap massive punches in a first round for the ages, but it was Marvelous Marvin who was advancing, and he gained control in round two.

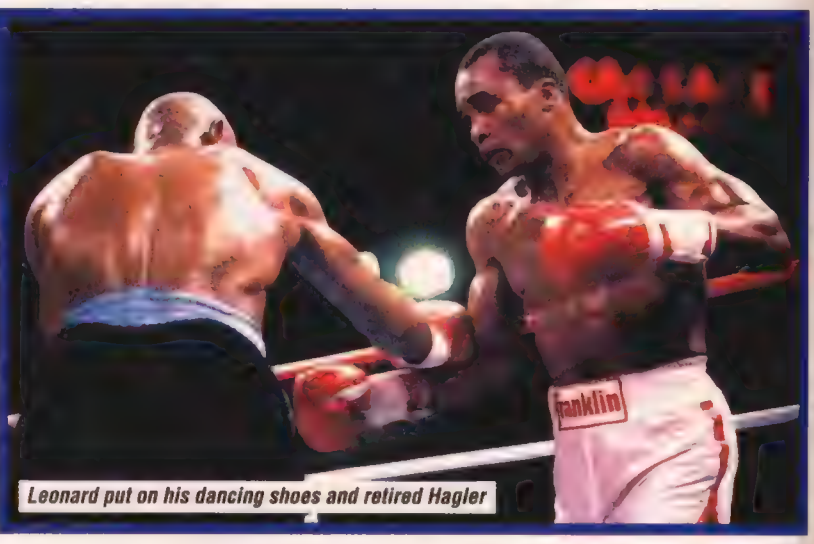
"The problem was that Marvin was just as determined as me, so something had to give," said Hearns. What gave was The Hitman's legs, but he had a moment of hope when referee Richard Steele stopped the action in round three to examine the gash over Hagler's eye. "I was praying it was over," said Hearns. "When it wasn't, I said, 'Oh my God. We gotta keep going.'"

Hagler's attitude? "They better hope I never bleed. It just makes me meaner."

Hagler closed with two looping rights, the second one clubbing Hearns on the back of his ear. He went down—his legs no longer able to hold him—and the most action-packed fight in middleweight history was over.

RAY LEONARD W 12 MARVIN HAGLER

Las Vegas, Nevada, April 6, 1987



Leonard put on his dancing shoes and retired Hagler

There are two ways of looking at this one: a brilliantly innovative triumph or a smoke-and-mirrors heist. Or perhaps it was a bit of both.

The 30-year-old Leonard emerged from a long retirement (only one fight in five years) to train fanatically for six months. He calculated correctly that Hagler, at almost 33, after 13 months out of the ring, was slowing down, and then Leonard insisted on 12 rounds, not 15.

Underdog Leonard danced from the first bell, staying well out of range and then closing with flurries to impress the judges. In the fourth, he taunted Hagler, cranking up his right and then landing to the body, but soon after absorbed his first flush, hard uppercut.

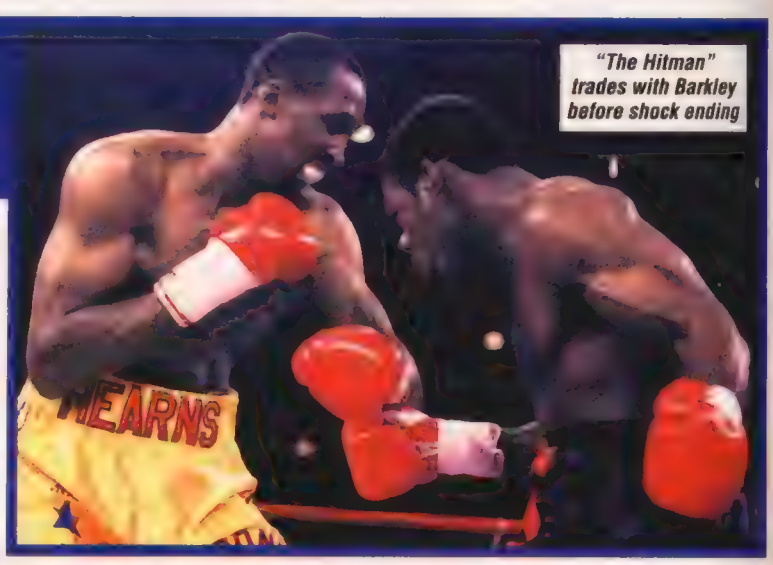
"Don't load up!" screamed his trainer, Angelo Dundee. "I want you to box and that is all."

Sugar Ray did as told, but still had to absorb heavy, damaging blows while his own were light and flashy. He sometimes seemed on the verge of collapse, and yet each time gritted his teeth and served up something in return. At the end of the ninth, when he seemed in trouble on the ropes, Leonard managed to fire an eight-punch combination. Hagler controlled the closing rounds, but was not sharp enough to finish Leonard.

Going into the 12th, Goody Petronelli, Hagler's trainer, seemed to realize they were at risk. "We need it bad," he pleaded. "Don't stop until he's down." Leonard ran, flurried, and survived to emerge with a highly disputed split-decision win by scores of 115-113, 118-110, and 113-115.

IRAN BARKLEY KO 3 THOMAS HEARNS

Las Vegas, Nevada, June 6, 1988



"The Hitman" trades with Barkley before shock ending

Hearns was settling in for a long reign after lifting the WBC middleweight title in his second attempt. Barkley seemed to offer little threat. After all, he'd been soundly outboxed by Sumbu Kalambay eight months earlier and had a relatively modest 24-4 (15) record, compared with 45-2 (38) for Hearns. But Hearns' trainer, Emanuel Steward, warned: "Barkley's not that skillful, but he just don't give a damn."

For two rounds, "The Blade" absorbed a terrible beating. Hearns' jab and right cross never seemed to miss, and he was also throwing brutal punches to the body. Barkley kept on pressuring him, but Hearns was simply too sharp and quick. When the challenger returned to his corner at the end of round two, he was badly cut over one eye and they asked him if he wanted to continue. "I'm not stopping for nothing!" he replied.

Hearns was loading up early in the third, pounding the body with massive hooks in a bid for a knockout, but "The Hitman" left himself open as he moved in for the finish, and Barkley fired one massive desperation right that caught him square and completely by surprise. Hearns fell on his back, and at the count of eight, teetered up unsteadily. Rather surprisingly, the normally cautious referee Richard Steele hovered as Barkley pounded him, before finally stepping in to stop the fight. It was a major upset, but Barkley would prove it was no fluke when he defeated Hearns again, by decision, four years later.

ROBERTO DURAN W 12 IRAN BARKLEY

Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 24, 1989

Even at 37, Duran outfought Barkley

When you looked at this pair squaring off together, the picture was faintly ridiculous: The 5'7", 37-year-old Duran was at his peak as world lightweight champion, and although he was firm and fit at 156¼ pounds, he looked tiny compared to the 6'1", 28-year-old, 159-pound Barkley—a huge middleweight who would go on to win titles at super middleweight and light heavyweight before settling in at heavyweight late in his career.

Old "Hands Of Stone," having his 92nd fight, made a big early impression, shaking Barkley with a right cross counter just before the bell to end round one. Over the next four rounds, the men went toe-to-toe, but by the middle rounds, Barkley's youth and size were telling. In round seven, he wobbled Duran with a double left hook, and in the eighth, he beat the old man to the punch, nearly dropping him with a left hook.

But it was Duran who controlled the final third of the fight. He shaded round nine, dominated the 10th, and then crowned it in round 11. Barkley missed with a right and Duran countered with a right cross to the chin, followed by a left hook that landed flush, another right to the jaw, a decoy left and then a fast, heavy right that dropped Barkley hard, for an eight-count. They slugged it out on even terms in the 12th to close THE RING's 1989 Fight of the Year. The scoring was 118-112 and 116-112 for Duran, and 116-113 for Barkley.

GERALD McCLELLAN KO 5 JULIAN JACKSON

Las Vegas, Nevada, May 8, 1993

McClellan overpowers the hard-punching Jackson

In any company, Jackson could be sure of one thing: If he landed clean, they were gone. His 43 knockouts in 47 fights illustrated a point reiterated by nearly all his opponents—that the Virgin Islander was the biggest hitter they ever fought. Two-and-a-half years earlier, Herol Graham boxed him silly, until one right cross to the mouth put him to sleep for five minutes. Jackson was now making his fifth defense of the WBC title against a younger man whose knockout ratio wasn't far behind. McClellan had 17 straight wins entering the fight, as did Jackson.

McClellan, 25, had a three-inch height advantage and looked the bigger man, but at first it seemed the edge in power lay with Jackson, who was a 3-1 favorite. They went at each other, punch for punch, and at the end of four rounds, the champion was slightly ahead (38-37 twice, and 38-38).

Jackson landed two low blows in the fifth—the second of them putting McClellan down and prompting a warning from referee Mills Lane. But McClellan wasn't cowed and soon after landed a brutal right to the chin that wobbled Jackson. He followed up with another big right and then a vicious hook that sent Jackson through the ropes. "The Hawk" hauled himself up, but "The G-Man" landed two more huge rights and Jackson collapsed in his own corner, with blood pouring down his face. Once again, he rose. But when he staggered into the ropes, Lane stopped the furious punchout. ■

Gavin Evans is a British freelance writer and regular contributor to this magazine.

THE PROFESSIONAL RECORD OF OSCAR DE LA HOYA

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

De La Hoya hooks early kayo victim Renaldo Carter

1992

Nov. 23	Lamar Williams, Inglewood, CA	KO 1
Dec. 12	Cliff Hicks, Phoenix	KO 1

1993

Jan. 3	Paris Alexander, Hollywood, CA	KO 2
Feb. 6	Curtis Strong, San Diego	KO 4
March 13	Jeff Mayweather, Las Vegas	KO 4
April 6	Mike Grable, Rochester, NY	W 8
May 8	Frankie Avelar, Stateline, NV	KO 4
June 7	Troy Dorsey, Las Vegas	KO 1
Aug. 14	Renaldo Carter, Bay St Louis, MS	KO 6
Aug. 27	Angelo Nunez, Beverly Hills, CA	KO 4
Oct. 30	Narciso Valenzuela, Phoenix	KO 1
March 5	Jimmi Bredahl, Los Angeles	KO 10

1994

May 27	Giorgio Campanella, Las Vegas	KO 3
July 29	Jorge Paez, Las Vegas	KO 2
Nov. 18	Carl Griffith, Las Vegas	KO 3
Dec. 10	John Avila, Los Angeles	KO 9

1995

Feb. 18	John-John Molina, Las Vegas	W 12
May 6	Rafael Ruelas, Las Vegas *(Wins IBF Lightweight Title)*	KO 2
Sept. 9	Genaro Hernandez, Las Vegas	KO 6
Dec. 15	Jesse James Leija, New York City	KO 2

1996

Feb. 9	Darryl Tyson, Las Vegas	KO 2
June 7	Julio Cesar Chavez, Las Vegas *(Wins WBC Super Lightweight Title)*	KO 4

1997

Jan. 18	Miguel Angel Gonzalez, Las Vegas *(Retains WBC Super Lightweight Title)*	W 12
April 12	Pernell Whitaker, Las Vegas *(Wins WBC Welterweight Title)*	W 12
June 14	David Kamau, San Antonio *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 2
Sept. 13	Hector Camacho, Las Vegas *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	W 12
Dec. 6	Wilfredo Rivera, Atlantic City *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 8

Oscar bowls over Jesse James Leija

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Julio Cesar Chavez takes a clubbing right hand en route to rematch loss

1998

June 13	Patrick Charpentier, El Paso, TX *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 3
Sept. 18	Julio Cesar Chavez, Las Vegas *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 8

1999

Feb. 13	Ike Quartey, Las Vegas *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	W 12
May 22	Oba Carr, Las Vegas *(Retains WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 11
Sept. 18	Felix Trinidad, Las Vegas *(Loses WBC Welterweight Title)*	L 12

2000

Feb. 26	Derrell Coley, New York City *(Subsequently Awarded Vacant WBC Welterweight Title)*	KO 7
June 17	Shane Mosley, Los Angeles *(Loses WBC Welterweight Title)*	L 12

2001

March 24	Arturo Gatti, Las Vegas	KO 5
June 23	Francisco Castillejo, Las Vegas *(Wins WBC Super Welterweight Title)*	W 12

2002

Sept. 14	Fernando Vargas, Las Vegas *(Wins Vacant World Junior Middleweight Title; Retains WBC Title; Wins WBA Title)*	KO 11

2003

May 3	Yory Boy Campas, Las Vegas *(Retains World Junior Middleweight Title)*	KO 7
Sept. 13	Shane Mosley, Las Vegas *(Loses World Junior Middleweight Title)*	L 12

2004

June 5	Felix Sturm, Las Vegas	W 12

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DREW	KO
40	37	3	0	29

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

De La Hoya rocks Yory Boy Campas with an uppercut

THE PROFESSIONAL RECORD OF BERNARD HOPKINS

PHOTO BY AL BELLO

Hopkins spears Willie Kemp with a jab

1988

Oct. 11	Clinton Mitchell, Atlantic City	L 4

1990

Feb. 22	Greg Paige, Philadelphia	W 4
April 26	Keith Gray, Philadelphia	KO 1
May 18	Ed Tyler, Atlantic City	KO 1
May 31	Jouvin Mercado, Rochester, NY	KO 2
June 30	Khalif Shabazz, Atlantic City	KO 1
Aug. 5	Percy Harris, Atlantic City	W 6
Oct. 20	Darrin Oliver, Atlantic City	KO 1
Nov. 17	Mike Sapp, Fort Myers, FL	KO 1

1991

Feb. 26	Richard Quiles, Philadelphia	KO 1
March 18	Steve Langley, Las Vegas	KO 3
June 20	Pedro Marquez, Parsippany, NJ	KO 1
July 9	Danny Mitchell, Philadelphia	KO 1
Sept. 23	Ralph Moncrief, Philadelphia	KO 1
Nov. 26	David McCluskey, Philadelphia	KO 5
Dec. 13	Willie Kemp, Atlantic City	W 10

1992

Jan. 31	Dennis Milton, Philadelphia	KO 4
April 3	Randy Smith, Atlantic City	W 10
May 21	Anibal Miranda, Paris	W 10
Aug. 28	James Stokes, Atlantic City	KO 1
Sept. 14	Eric Rhinehart, Philadelphia	KO 1
Dec. 4	Wayne Powell, Atlantic City	KO 1

1993

Feb. 16	Gilbert Baptist, Denver	W 12
May 22	Roy Jones, Washington, D.C. *(For Vacant IBF Middleweight Title)*	L 12
Aug. 3	Roy Ritchie, Las Vegas	KO 7
Nov. 23	Wendall Hall, Philadelphia	KO 3

PHOTO BY CHUCK PULIN

"The Executioner" chops away at Lupe Aquino's body

PHOTO BY [illegible]

Ancient Simon Brown absorbs a heavy uppercut

1994

Feb. 26	Melvin Wynn, Atlantic City	KO 3
May 17	Lupe Aquino, Atlantic City	W 12
Dec. 17	Segundo Mercado, Quito, Ecuador *(For Vacant IBF Middleweight Title)*	D 12

1995

April 29	Segundo Mercado, Landover, MD *(Wins Vacant IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 7

PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

Hopkins scores a knockdown of badly overmatched Morrade Hakkar

1996

Jan. 27	Steve Frank, Phoenix *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 1
March 16	Joe Lipsey, Las Vegas *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 4
July 16	Bo James, Atlantic City *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 11

1997

April 19	John David Jackson, Shreveport, LA *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 7
July 20	Glen Johnson, Indio, CA *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 11
Nov. 18	Andrew Council, Upper Marlboro, MD *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	W 12

1998

Jan. 31	Simon Brown, Atlantic City *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 6
Aug. 28	Robert Allen, Las Vegas *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	No-Contest 4

1999

Feb. 6	Robert Allen, Washington, D.C. *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 7
Dec. 12	Antwun Echols, Miami, FL *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	W 12

2000

May 13	Syd Vanderpool, Indianapolis *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	W 12
Dec. 1	Antwun Echols, Las Vegas *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title)*	KO 10

2001

April 14	Keith Holmes, New York City *(Retains IBF Middleweight Title; Wins WBC Middleweight Title)*	W 12
Sept. 29	Felix Trinidad, New York City *(Unifies Middleweight Title)*	KO 12

2002

Feb. 2	Carl Daniels, Reading, PA *(Retains World Middleweight Title)*	KO 10

2003

March 29	Morrade Hakkar, Philadelphia *(Retains World Middleweight Title)*	KO 8
Dec. 13	William Joppy, Atlantic City *(Retains World Middleweight Title)*	W 12

2004

June 5	Robert Allen, Las Vegas *(Retains World Middleweight Title)*	W 12

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DREW	KO	NO-CONTEST
48	44	2	1	31	1

TALE OF THE TAPE

OSCAR DE LA HOYA vs. BERNARD HOPKINS

February 4, 1973	BIRTHDATE	January 15, 1965
East Los Angeles, CA	BIRTHPLACE	Philadelphia, PA
Whittier, CA	HOMETOWN	Newark, DE
31	AGE	39
160*	WEIGHT	160*
5′11″	HEIGHT	6′2″
72″	REACH	75″
15 1/2″	NECK	15″
39″	CHEST (NORMAL)	39 1/2″
42 1/2″	CHEST (EXPANDED)	42 1/2″
13 3/4″	BICEPS	14″
12″	FOREARM	12″
7″	WRIST	6″
31 3/4″	WAIST	31″
21″	THIGH	21″
13 1/2″	CALF	14″

*Exact weights to be announced at official weigh-in

ROUND	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
DE LA HOYA													
HOPKINS													

OSCAR DE LA HOYA BY THE NUMBERS

This was De La Hoya's one and only unanimous decision loss

1

Total knockdowns scored by De La Hoya in his five fights at junior middleweight or middleweight

1

Losses by De La Hoya by each kind of decision: unanimous, split, and majority

1-1

De La Hoya's record when fighting on the date September 18

2

Points by which De La Hoya defeated Felix Sturm on all three scorecards in his last fight

2

Points by which De La Hoya lost to Shane Mosley on all three scorecards in his previous fight

4

Times De La Hoya has been knocked down as a pro

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

Oscar would get up from this and his other three knockdowns

15

Number of major alphabet titlists De La Hoya has defeated

30

Age by which De La Hoya once promised he would be retired

31

De La Hoya's current age

31

Wins on De La Hoya's record when he lost for the first time

32

Number of pounds between De La Hoya's lightest pro weight and his weight for the Sturm fight

4

Years since De La Hoya last fought somewhere other than Las Vegas

6

Divisions in which De La Hoya has won an alphabet belt

6

Number of fighters who have suffered their first pro defeat at the hands of De La Hoya

10

Consecutive knockout wins by De La Hoya between May '93 and December '94, the longest such streak of his career

27,000,000

Minimum amount, in dollars, De La Hoya will make for fighting Hopkins ■

De La Hoya beat Jimmi Bredahl 32 pounds ago

PHOTO BY TOM CASINO/HBO

Jorge Paez is one of the 15 titlists De La Hoya has defeated

BERNARD HOPKINS BY THE NUMBERS

William Joppy was one of four challengers to Hopkins' undisputed title

0

Wins on Hopkins' record when he lost for the first time

2

Times Hopkins has been knocked down as a pro

4

Successful defenses Hopkins has made of the undisputed middleweight title

5

Years since Hopkins has had a fight that lasted less than eight full rounds

6

Number of fighters who have suffered their first pro defeat at the hands of Hopkins

8

Consecutive knockout wins by Hopkins between October '90 and November '91, the longest such streak of his career

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

It's been 11 years since Hopkins' loss to Roy Jones

The blowout of Frank took only 24 seconds

11

Years since Hopkins' last professional defeat

16.67

Percentage of Hopkins' title defenses that have come against Robert Allen

18

Successful defenses Hopkins has made of the IBF middleweight title

202

Total rounds on all judges' scorecards, out of a possible 222, that Hopkins won in his last seven fights

10,000,000

Minimum amount of dollars Hopkins will make for fighting De La Hoya ■

20

Successful defenses Hopkins says he'd like to make before he retires

24

Seconds it took Hopkins to knock out Steve Frank, a middleweight title fight record

39, 8, 3

Years, months, and days Hopkins will have been alive when he steps into ring on September 18

44

Months separating the length of Hopkins' title reign and that of boxing's second-longest reigning beltholder, Veerapol Sahaprom

177

Hopkins' weight, in pounds, in his pro debut

PHOTO BY JIM CASINO/HBO

This fight is going to make Hopkins a wealthy man

20 CATEGORY COMPARISON

Bernard Hopkins		Oscar De La Hoya
✔	JAB	
	HOOK	✔
✔	RIGHT HAND	
✔	UPPERCUT	
✔	BODYPUNCHING	
✔	INFIGHTING	
	COMBINATIONS	✔
✔	DEFENSE	✔
	HAND SPEED	✔
	FOOT SPEED	✔
✔	STRENGTH	
✔	RING GENERALSHIP	
✔	VERSATILITY	
✔	CHIN	✔
✔	STAMINA	
✔	MOTIVATION	
✔	FINISHING ABILITY	✔
✔	HEART	✔
	SUPERFIGHT EXPERIENCE	✔
	FAN SUPPORT	✔

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Hopkins, pictured vs. Carl Daniels, is the better bodypuncher

De La Hoya, pictured vs. Fernando Vargas, has the superior hook

BACK ISSUES OF KO

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June 2002: Tyson vs. Lewis: 10-Page Preview & Analysis. Interview: Jameel McCline. Also: *Ali* movie, Dorin vs. Balbi & Ward vs. Leija.

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Feb. 2004: Shane Mosley: A Second Chance At Superstardom. Interview: Bernard Hopkins. Also: Laila Ali, Scott LeDoux, retirement.

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October 2004: Dr. Klitschko: The Perfect Band-Aid For The Heavyweight Division. Interview: Diego Corrales. Also: Monte Barrett, Cory Spinks, Vinny Paz & Sven Ottke.

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☐ SEP/96	☐ MAR/98	☐ MAY/99	☐ MAR/00	☐ JUN/01	☐ MAR/03
☐ NOV/96	☐ MAY/98	☐ JUN/99	☐ MAY/00	☐ AUG/01	☐ MAY/03
☐ DEC/96	☐ JUN/98	☐ JUL/99	☐ JUN/00	☐ OCT/01	☐ JUL/03
☐ WIN/96	☐ AUG/98	☐ AUG/99	☐ JUL/00	☐ DEC/01	☐ SEP/03
☐ JAN/97	☐ SEP/98	☐ SEP/99	☐ AUG/00	☐ FEB/02	☐ NOV/03
☐ MAR/97	☐ NOV/98	☐ OCT/99	☐ SEP/00	☐ APR/02	☐ WIN/03
☐ AUG/97	☐ DEC/98	☐ NOV/99	☐ OCT/00	☐ JUN/02	☐ FEB/04
☐ DEC/97	☐ HOL/98	☐ DEC/99	☐ NOV/00	☐ AUG/02	☐ APR/04
☐ HOL/97	☐ JAN/99	☐ HOL/99	☐ DEC/00	☐ OCT/02	☐ JUN/04
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OSCAR DE LA HOYA

HIS CAREER IN QUOTES

Since becoming the only member of the United States boxing team to win a gold medal at the 1992 Olympics, Oscar De La Hoya has been a media darling, garnering more positive press than virtually any boxer in the world. Although "The Golden Boy" has worked hard at keeping his public comments politically correct, another side of him surfaces from time to time, revealing the man beneath the myth. Here, then, is a collection of quotes by and about boxing's most bankable star.

"You should've seen me when I first got back from Barcelona. I wore it everywhere—in the shower, to bed with me. Wouldn't let nobody touch it or put it around their neck."

—De La Hoya, on the gold medal he won at the 1992 Olympics

"I wish I'd had more rounds. I felt strong, very fast. I felt comfortable, but it was weird without the headgear."

—De La Hoya, on his first-round kayo of Lamar Williams, November 23, 1992

"The greatest possibility for a major crossover fighter is someone Hispanic and bilingual. The demographics are right. The Hispanic market is huge and, to some degree, untapped. They are becoming boxing's core audience."

—Bob Arum, assessing De La Hoya's box office potential on the eve of his second pro fight

"People think I'm great, and I think I'm great, too. I mean, I think I'm pretty good."

—De La Hoya, evaluating himself following his second pro victory, a one-round kayo of Cliff Hicks, December 12, 1992

"I'm making a business decision, for my future … Now I'm in full control. That's what I wanted. I'm the head man here."

—De La Hoya, on why he fired his original co-managers Robert Mittleman and Steve Nelson, in December 1993

"My strategy was to kill his stomach, but he killed my face first."

—Jimmi Bredahl, on what happened in his 10th-round TKO loss to De La Hoya, March 7, 1994

"I never thought Oscar could fight, but now I think he's a great fighter."

—Gabriel Ruelas, after watching De La Hoya stop his brother, Rafael, in less than two rounds to win the IBF lightweight title, May 6, 1995

"I don't care about the IBF. If they're more interested in politics than good fights, to heck with them."

—De La Hoya, on the IBF stripping him of its lightweight title in July 1995

De La Hoya tags a bloody James Leija with a left hook en route to an overwhelming second-round knockout. "The Golden Boy's" first appearance at Madison Square Garden drew rave reviews.

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PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

With killer looks like this, how could De La Hoya resist being a "naughty boy" and doing some partying from time to time?

"He was always a little snob, even as an amateur."

—Genaro Hernandez, on soon-to-be opponent De La Hoya

"I broke his nose and he couldn't take it. He quit. He knew I was going to do more damage."

—De La Hoya, on his sixth-round TKO of Hernandez, September 9, 1995

"De La Hoya turned fight night into Oscar night, and he could not have done more damage to Leija had he beaten him over the head with a gold-plated statuette."

—*New York Post* columnist Wallace Mathews, writing about De La Hoya's second-round kayo of James Leija in his Madison Square Garden debut, December 15, 1995

"The pretty boy was never so pretty as he was turning Julio Cesar Chavez pretty ugly. Chavez' trunks—red and white and green, the Mexican colors—were a bloody flag, and his face a ghastly mask splotched with crimson."

—New York *Daily News* columnist Mark Kriegel, on De La Hoya's four-round butchery of Chavez, June 7, 1996

"Oscar De La Hoya never did locate the slick champion, but he did manage to find a rabbit and pull it out of his sombrero. Oddsmakers said Whitaker wasn't supposed to defeat boxing's new, marketable crossover savior. The judges made sure he didn't."

—*USA Today* boxing writer Jon Saraceno, on De La Hoya's controversial decision over Pernell Whitaker, April 12, 1997

"In every fight, it helps to have a hero and a villain. That certainly wasn't the case in Oscar's other fights, until now. Hector plays the part of the villain really well."

—Bob Arum, during the buildup to the De La Hoya-Hector Camacho fight

"I was a bit frustrated because he was holding a lot, but that's the way Camacho fights. If he can't win, he tries to survive."

—De La Hoya, on his failure to kayo Camacho as predicted in their September 13, 1997, bout

"At first it was a scary feeling. But you just laugh about it and show no fear, even though you're scared inside."

—De La Hoya, on being in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, when Hurricane Nora struck in September 1997

"Oscar De La Hoya, young, dynamic, and principled, took another giant step toward the Hall of Fame."

—*Philadelphia Inquirer* boxing writer Jay Searcy, on De La Hoya's eighth-round knockout of Wilfredo Rivera, December 6, 1997

"He's so much better than anyone else, it doesn't matter who he fights."

—Bob Arum, on the 45,368 fans who turned out in El Paso, Texas, to watch De La Hoya score a third-round kayo of no-hope challenger Patrick Charpentier, June 13, 1998

"I was a naughty boy one time. I knew I had my limits. I don't do anything bad. I drink, but I don't have a high tolerance for alcohol. Sometimes I want to be human. Once or twice a year, I just want to let loose. It keeps me balanced."

—De La Hoya, in August 1998, responding to reports that he got drunk and danced on tables with half-clad females

"I'm loyal to this promoter. He's like a father to me. I really admire and care about the man."

—De La Hoya, in June 1998, denying rumors that he was planning to leave promoter Bob Arum

"I was even more satisfied that I made him quit."

—De La Hoya, summing up his feelings after Julio Cesar Chavez capitulated at the end of the eighth round of their rematch, September 18, 1998

"Put it this way: I have a collection of Wonderbras."

—De La Hoya, in 1998, when asked whether women throw themselves at him

"It was one of the great, great welterweight fights I've ever seen. People questioned him, but he proved himself to be a great fighter tonight."

—Trainer Gil Clancy, in the immediate aftermath of De La Hoya's up-from-the-floor victory over Ike Quartey, February 13, 1999

"Whenever Don King is involved in a fight, you know something controversial is going to happen. I won't go as far as to say he paid anyone off, but I think his influence had something to do with it."

—De La Hoya, after suffering his first pro loss, to Felix Trinidad, via controversial decision, September 18, 1999

"De La Hoya showed the chicken nickname put on him by the whole world is true."

—Trinidad, on De La Hoya's decision to run the last three rounds of their fight

"The decision stunk."

—Mike Tyson, on the official scoring of Trinidad-De La Hoya

"I think I won the fight by maybe one point. If it's that close, why not make it a draw? Why take it away from me like that? I don't feel it's justice."

—De La Hoya, on the decision loss to Shane Mosley that cost him the welterweight title, June 17, 2000

"I think there's a better than 50 percent chance that Oscar will never fight again."

—Arum, in the wake of De La Hoya's loss to Mosley

"When we asked for documents of pay-per-view numbers, of money from international rights that should be coming in, and we don't get it until months and years later, then there's something wrong. It is not a straight business Bob is running."

—De La Hoya, on one of the reasons he filed a lawsuit to end his contract with Arum in August 2000

"Despicable."

—Arum's one-word reaction to De La Hoya's lawsuit

"I see no reason why I can't embrace two careers simultaneously."

—De La Hoya, in October 2000, upon the release of his debut CD of romantic ballads

"Arum's people hope that I lose because they can't see a Mexican above them, and also that he has defeated [in court] one of the biggest Jews to come out of Harvard."

—De La Hoya, in March 2001, on his former promoter, from whom he had just won promotional freedom

De La Hoya and his promoter, Bob Arum, have had their ups and downs over the years, and even split up briefly. But when it comes to making money, they've been a super-successful team.

"In an interview with a reporter at *La Opinion*, I made certain remarks regarding my former promoter, Bob Arum, that I sincerely regret. I did not mean to insult Bob Arum and his family or any ethnic or religious group in any way. I humbly apologize to anyone the remark may have offended."

—De La Hoya, March 30, 2001

"I'm not even close to becoming as a good a fighter as I can. This was just the start."

—De La Hoya, following his five-round pummeling of Arturo Gatti, March 24, 2001

"To be included with Hearns and Leonard is history, but I want one more title, at 160."

—De La Hoya, after decisioning Javier Castillejo to capture the WBC super welterweight title, June 23, 2001

"I'm not a 130-pound puncher anymore. A lot of people are surprised when they get in the ring with me. They don't think I'm fast enough or they don't think I'm strong enough. Maybe they still think I'm that little puppy I told you about eight years ago. But I can pack a punch, that's for sure, and people are going to have to respect that."

—De La Hoya, following his exciting knockout of Fernando Vargas, September 14, 2002

"This was Oscar's best fight ever. He faced adversity and rallied from adversity."

—Arum (reunited with De La Hoya after a two-fight separation), on De La Hoya's victory over Vargas

"I've always felt that my blood is Mexican."

—De La Hoya, on being given a certificate of Mexican nationality, December 11, 2002

Never a graceful loser, De La Hoya called for an investigation following his second loss to Shane Mosley, in September 2003. The investigation went nowhere, but the incident gave ammunition to critics who believe Oscar is a crybaby.

"This is not a short-term project as this is my future in boxing. We are committed to showcasing young and Hispanic fighters on a consistent basis."

—De La Hoya, in January 2003, upon launching *Boxeo De Oro*, a series of fight cards to be televised by HBO Latino

"I will seek a full investigation on what happened. I just feel in my heart that the decision should have gone to me. I'm happy to have the financial resources to put the best lawyers on this. I'm not a sore loser; I'm doing this for boxing."

—De La Hoya, on the unanimous decision awarded to Shane Mosley in their rematch, September 13, 2003

"This was such a frigging outrage that I'll never be party to this again."

—Arum, on the Mosley-De La Hoya II decision

"Everything went wrong. Everything. What can I do? What can I say? I trained as hard as I could. I did everything perfect; I sparred with big guys, but when I stepped into the ring, *boom*—nothing."

—De La Hoya, on his less than convincing decision over Felix Sturm, June 5, 2004

"Everybody knows I won this fight. He got the win because he's a big name."

—Sturm, reacting to the decision in De La Hoya's favor

"The fight is happening, believe me the fight is happening. I'm really looking forward to it."

—De La Hoya, reassuring the media that he's going through with his September 18 bout against middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins ■

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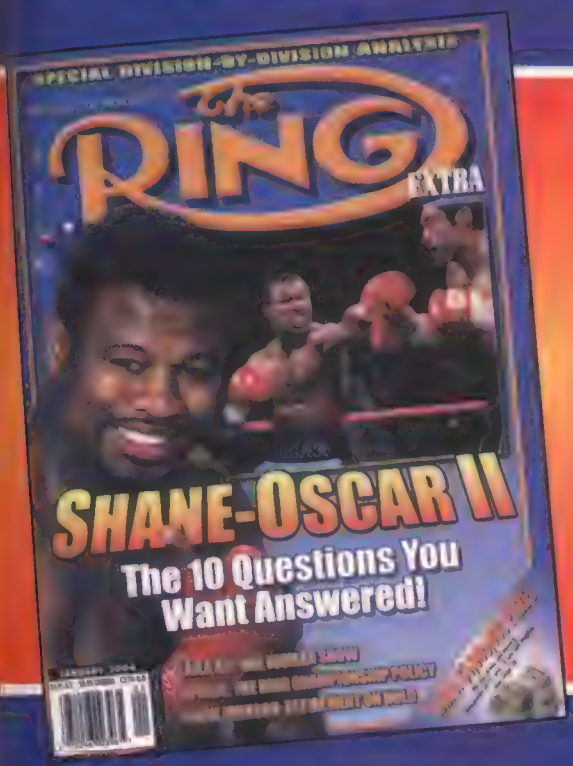

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BERNARD HOPKINS

HIS CAREER IN QUOTES

Bernard Hopkins has always been outspoken, seldom hesitating to give his brutally candid opinion on darned near any subject under the sun. While it took a while for some of the media to catch on, he is now considered perhaps the most quotable fighter in the world. "The Executioner's" words have come back to haunt him from time to time, but that certainly hasn't shut him up. Moreover, Hopkins' strong opinions and in-your-face personality have also elicited intriguing comments from others. Here, then, is a collection of some of the more compelling quotes from and about the undisputed middleweight champion of the world.

"It's not a bad place to train. It's in the mountains. The air is clean and fresh. And there's no shortage of tough guys for sparring."

—Hopkins, on returning to Graterford Prison in September 1992, where he was once incarcerated, to train

"I have more than one dimension. I am more than just a puncher."

—Hopkins, after knocking out Eric Rhinehart with one punch in the first round on September 14, 1992

"I was too tentative. Jones has blazing speed, but he slaps a lot. I give him credit though. He does almost everything wrong—he punches with the wrong foot in front, he doesn't put his body into his punches—but he gets away with it because he's so fast, and he's constantly moving."

—Hopkins, following his May 22, 1993, decision loss to Roy Jones

"Ain't no nice guys in this sport."

—Hopkins, after his November 23, 1993, third-round kayo of Wendell Hall

"People are starting to get a whiff of what Jones is all about, and it smells kind of rotten."

—Hopkins, in 1994, regarding Roy Jones' reluctance to give him a rematch

"One of the judges, Al DeVito, got mugged right outside the front door. The whole country was under martial law or something. Everywhere you looked there were people in uniform carrying M-16s and Uzis. And everybody in the country is hostile toward us, because we're fighting their man."

—Hopkins' promoter Butch Lewis, on the atmosphere in Quito, Ecuador, where Hopkins fought a draw with Segundo Mercado on December 17, 1994

"Look, I'm not saying I'm better than Bennie Briscoe or Boogaloo Watts or Georgie Benton. Those guys are legends. I owe them a debt I can never repay because they created the tradition I've always tried to live up to."

—Hopkins, on knocking out Mercado on April 29, 1995, to become the first Philadelphia fighter to win the middleweight title

Both Hopkins and Jones raised their arms in victory at the end of their 12-rounder for the vacant IBF middleweight title in 1993. Jones got the decision, and efforts to rematch the two pound-for-pounders in the ensuing years have gradually been reduced to a war of words.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

"The bodyshots were all over me. By far, he's the best fighter I've ever fought."

—William "Bo" James, after being stopped by Hopkins in the 11th round on July 19, 1996

"Butch doesn't want his fighters to challenge him, to ask questions, or to know much about his business. I'm no Michael Spinks. No disrespect to Michael, who was a great fighter, but I'm nobody's yes man. I'm not going to sign my check and turn it over. Butch calls that loyalty. I call it being a fool."

—Hopkins, on October 16, 1996, firing an early salvo in his war of words with his estranged promoter, Butch Lewis

PHOTO BY JASON LAVIN

Best of enemies: Promoter Butch Lewis and Hopkins back in 1996, prior to their breakup. A nasty court battle between them finally ended in 1997 when a judge ruled that Lewis' contract with Hopkins had expired.

"The reason Bernard is so upset is that he thinks his belt automatically entitles him to a million-dollar purse. But in the real boxing world, if you don't weigh 220 pounds it's a buyers market, and we're not working with a guy who has a gold medal around his neck."

—Lewis, talking about his problems with Hopkins in the Winter 1996 issue of *KO*

"Butch Lewis is the most arrogant guy that I've ever dealt with in my life."

—Hopkins, on Lewis, from the same issue of *KO*

"Free at last."

—Hopkins, in June 1997, reacting to the news that U.S. District Court Judge Anita B. Brody had ruled that his contract with Lewis had expired

"Ever take a piece of bread and have to pick the roaches off it before you eat it? Or open a can of beans and eat 'em right out of the can because the gas has been turned off? I've been there. It's a big part of who I am."

—Hopkins, in October 1997, explaining why he's so careful with his money

"I've watched the tapes of the fight several times and it was like this was his time in the limelight and he was going to make the most out of it. He was pushing; he wouldn't let us fight in close. I just thought he was overaggressive."

—Hopkins, on referee Kenny Chevalier, who worked Hopkins' November 18, 1997, title fight with Andrew Council

"When HBO puts their arms around me, people will finally realize that here is a blue-collar fighter with a body chiseled out of rock, who always gives his best performance, who's willing to die for his job because this is all I have."

—Hopkins, on learning his January 1998 defense against Simon Brown would be televised by HBO

"David is on Similac. He needs to get on whole milk first."

—Hopkins, in January 1998, commenting on giving fellow Philadelphian David Reid a title shot

"Bernard Hopkins can't even hold my shoes. Every second of that fight, I could have beaten Hopkins. He makes too many mistakes. It looks like when he swings, he closed his eyes and he's scared. He can't fight. They say he's the best middleweight, but, to me, he can't fight."

—David Reid, critiquing Hopkins' sixth-round kayo of Simon Brown on January 31, 1998

"Look, David is young. When I said he was a baby, all I meant is that he's young and has to grow up in this sport a little. I didn't mean anything derogatory. It was all meant in fun. If he took it the wrong way, what can I say?"

—Hopkins, in February 1998, taking a diplomatic approach to his brewing feud with Reid

"I had what I call a Kool-Aid smile. I was cheesing from ear to ear. I had such a good time, I was ready to knock Mickey Mouse out."

—Hopkins, on his first trip to Disney World, in August 1998

"I think he bailed out. He could have continued to fight. He didn't want to, because he knew I was a lot stronger than him on the inside."

—Robert Allen, following his August 28, 1998, bout with Hopkins that ended in a no-contest when Hopkins was accidentally pushed out of the ring by referee Mills Lane

Olympic champion David Reid shares a laugh with Hopkins in 1998. They traded barbs in the press for several months when there was much talk of matching them against one another. But Reid's retirement due to an eye injury prevented the bout from happening.

"I was slandered by my own promoter."

—Hopkins, in October 1998, responding to Dan Goossen's charge that Hopkins had turned down a rematch with Roy Jones

"Fighters have no chance against promoters. It's like a welterweight fighting Mike Tyson."

—Hopkins, in January 1999, testifying at a hearing conducted by the National Association of Attorneys General Boxing Task Force

"The business part of boxing makes me want to throw up."

—Hopkins, in February 1999

"He hit me with some good shots. But he hit me in a sensitive area, too. I saw white when he hit me,"

—Robert Allen, on the punches he absorbed, fair and foul, during his seventh-round TKO loss to Hopkins on February 6, 1999

"It's hard to promote a fighter who doesn't want to be promoted. You always want to have a good relationship, and I really believe we could have one with Bernard, but all he ever talks about is how promoters supposedly take advantage of fighters. He never takes the positive approach to anything."

—Dan Goossen, in May 1999, speaking about the tribulations of promoting Hopkins

"I'm a tough guy, but I never saw anything like that. I've got more respect for women now than ever before."

—Hopkins, in July 1999, after watching his wife, Jeannette, give birth to their daughter, Latrece

"By not fighting as much, I've been preserved. I've taken less punishment. I'm like grandma's peaches sitting on the shelf in the basement, collecting dust, waiting for my time."

—Hopkins, in December 1999, explaining the secret of his longevity

"That's gross. That ain't net. It's going to get chopped up real good."

—Hopkins, on the paltry $100,000 purse he received for his December 12, 1999, decision over Antwun Echols

"If I was an Italian in South Philly, there'd be a lot more support and respect from the media

PHOTO BY BRIAN LAHAV

Trinidad's supporters in San Juan were in a festive mood when this photo was taken. But shortly thereafter, things turned ugly when Hopkins threw the Puerto Rican flag on the ground and started a riot.

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PHOTO BY TOM MCDONOUGH

Hopkins cradles his daughter, Latrece, while talking with HBO's Larry Merchant. The champ said he gained added respect for women after watching his wife, Jeanette, give birth to their child in 1999.

and boxing world, because becoming a champion is not done every day by a Caucasian."

—Hopkins, in February 2000, on racism in boxing

"I'm from Philadelphia; I've heard people boo Santa Claus."

—Hopkins, on the crowd's reaction to his sloppy fight with Syd Vanderpool on May 13, 2000

"Don is getting the best middleweight since Marvin Hagler."

—Hopkins, in January 2001, upon signing a six-fight deal with Don King

"I think the guy had on turtle-neck shorts."

—Hopkins, responding to complaints he hit Keith Holmes low en route to a unanimous decision on April 14, 2001, to take the WBC middleweight belt

"I've seen a lot of riots. I've seen riots in the yard at Graterford, but it wasn't nothing like that. When I saw Tito's fans coming after me, I thought, *Oh, s---!*"

—Hopkins, on what happened after he threw the Puerto Rican flag on the ground in San Juan during a publicity tour for his fight with Trinidad

"Bernard Hopkins gave one of the greatest tactical performances in the history of the illustrious middleweight division. He made Tito's left hook vanish. It was less fight than recital."

—*Philadelphia Daily News* columnist Bill Conlin, on Hopkins' 12th-round TKO of Felix Trinidad, on September 29, 2001, to win the undisputed middleweight championship

"The first thing I thought of when it was over was, *I've got those f---ers now* ... I saw all the people who did me wrong. They showed up to see me get slain. But they didn't know that for all those years, they've been the ones who have motivated me."

—Hopkins, on the first thing that popped into his mind after beating Trinidad

"Sixty-forty, and I'll kick your butt."

—Roy Jones, during a lively on-air contract negotiation with Hopkins, following Hopkins' 10th-round TKO of Carl Daniels on February 2, 2002

"It wasn't about money. It was about getting my reputation back. It was about truth. I have nothing more important to me than my reputation. Even though I was the plaintiff, I felt like the defendant because my integrity was on trail. I told the truth and won."

—Former Hopkins adviser Lou DiBella, in November 2002, after a federal jury awarded him $610,000 in a defamation suit stemming from Hopkins' accusation that DiBella has asked for a $50,000 bribe to place him on an HBO card

"The Lou DiBella situation is the truth, absolutely. I'll go to my grave with that. But I think we both went too far."

—Hopkins, on the DiBella case

"Why should I be ashamed? I didn't make the guy the number-one contender."

—Hopkins, deflecting criticism of his March 29, 2003, title defense against woefully outclassed Morrade Hakkar, the WBC's mandatory challenger

"A little controversy sells. Some of it makes you popular; some makes you unpopular. Nobody is looking for choirboys in this country. They're looking for adversity."

—Hopkins, speaking of his maverick image in the February 2004 issue of *KO*

"Joppy is done. He probably won't fight again."

—Hopkins, commenting on the one-sided beating he gave Joppy in their December 13, 2003, bout

"If you had taken my blood pressure then, I'd have been dead."

—Hopkins, on how he felt watching Oscar De La Hoya struggle to beat Felix Sturm on June 5, 2004, a fight De La Hoya had to win in order for his September fight with Hopkins to happen ■

PHOTO BY [illegible]

Hopkins puts Morrade Hakkar on the floor en route to an eight-round knockout in March 2003. The inept Hakkar had no business being in the ring with the world champion, but the WBC somehow made the Frenchman its number-one contender.

The RING COVERS

Oscar De La Hoya & Bernard Hopkins

It was back in early-2000, during a visit to THE RING's editorial offices in Ambler, Pennsylvania, that Bernard Hopkins made the editors an offer that, unfortunately, they had to refuse.

"I'll buy 100 copies if you'll put me on the cover," said Hopkins. "No, wait, I'll tell you what, I'll buy every copy I can find in the Philadelphia, South Jersey, and Delaware area!"

Hopkins was half-serious, half-joking, but there was no denying his sincere desire to see himself on the cover of boxing's foremost publication. And if cover subjects were chosen strictly on merit, he probably would have been on the cover already. After all, Hopkins won the IBF middleweight title back in April 1995, and had made 10 successful defenses before making his unorthodox offer.

But who goes on the cover of any magazine has a lot more to do with marketability than worthiness, and until he signed for his 2001 superfight with Felix Trinidad, "The Executioner" simply wasn't saleable enough to qualify. That's all changed since Hopkins crushed "Tito" to become undisputed middleweight champion, of course, and the issue you're reading marks 'Nard's sixth cover appearance.

De La Hoya, on the other hand, never had to go begging for a cover. He became an instant celebrity thanks to his Olympic gold medal and movie star looks, and he made the cover after engaging in only three pro fights. In the ensuing years, his box office power and accomplishments inside the ring have put "The Golden Boy" back on the cover numerous times, with this issue being his 20th RING appearance.

Now, of course, the big question is who will grace the cover of the issue of THE RING that carries the story of De La Hoya and Hopkins' September 18 blockbuster. Whoever it turns out to be, he can probably count on several more covers before his career is over, while the loser may have already made his final appearance.

Date: May 1993

Cover Photo: By Marc Morrison

Cover Story: Just three fights into his professional career, "The Golden Boy" was already deemed cover-worthy—and in the story "Oscar De La Hoya's Sprint To The Title: Is He Good Enough *Now*?", author Robert Cassidy explored the topic of whether De La Hoya was title-shot-worthy, too. Following his pro debut, De La Hoya boldly announced he was ready for long-reigning 130-pound kingpin Azumah Nelson, and while his management team wisely suggested it wasn't the right time for that matchup, they were moving Oscar extraordinarily quickly. After fighting less than four rounds in his first three fights, De La Hoya already had an eight-rounder against veteran Jeff Mayweather scheduled, and there was talk of a title fight before his career was 13 months old.

Also In This Issue: "IBF Lightweight Champ Freddie Pendleton: He's Finally Earned The Right To Be Cocky," by Jeff Ryan … "An Open Letter To Lennox Lewis: Don't Ever Lose Sight Of Your *Real* Goal," by Joseph C. Tintle … "Who Will Be 'Lord Of The Flys'? A Preview Of The Carbajal-Gonzalez Clash," by Bruce Williams … New Faces: Derrell Coley … Fighter of the Month: Julio Borboa, fresh off an upset knockout of Robert Quiroga for a junior bantamweight belt.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was unrated; Hopkins was number nine at middleweight.

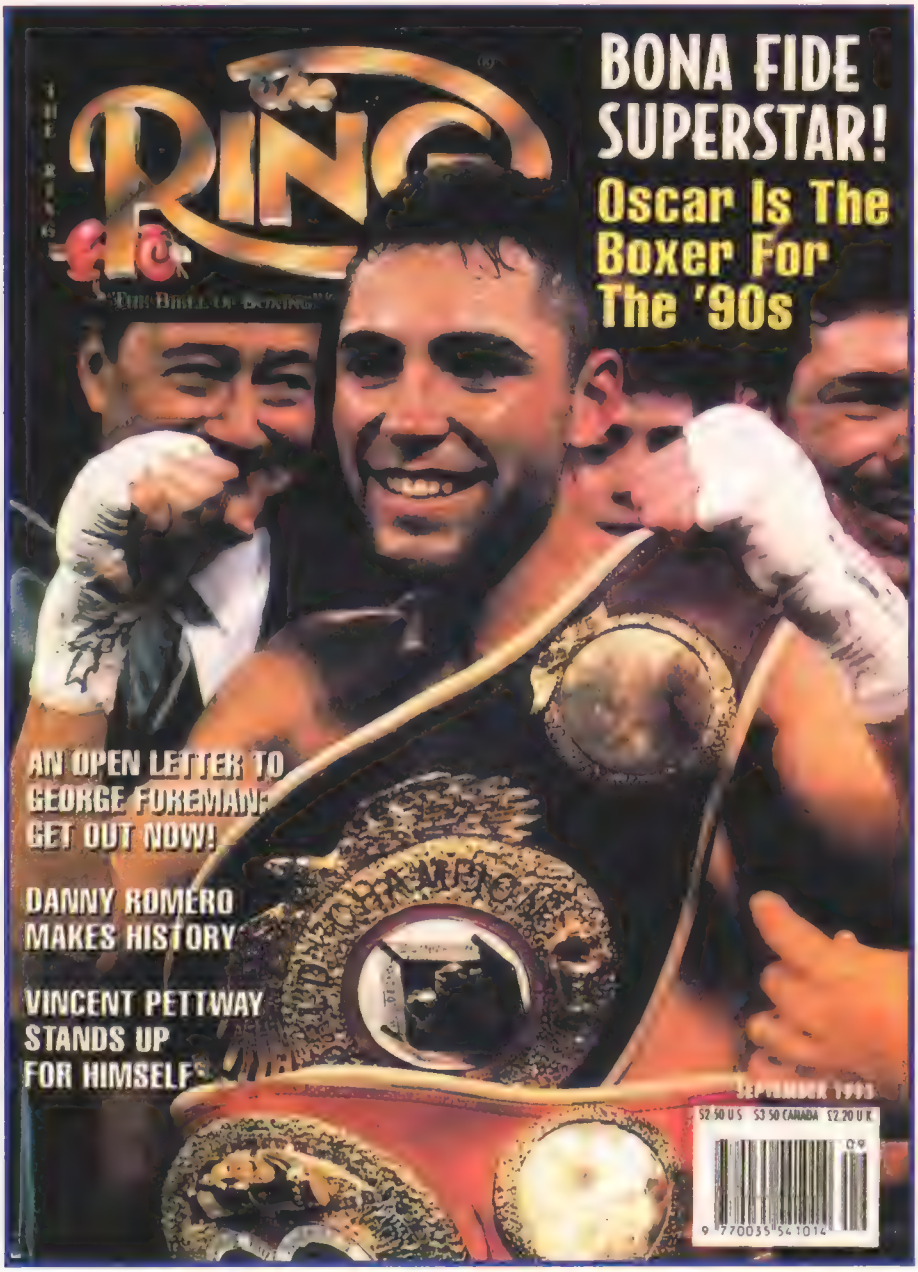
Date: July 1994

Cover Photo: By Brent Cook

Cover Story: Although the headline on the cover was decidedly positive, the story inside gave more of a mixed review of De La Hoya's stoppage win over Jimmi Bredahl that earned the Olympic gold medalist his first professional title. In "The Golden Boy Takes A Shaky Step Toward Superstardom," writer Ivan Goldman analyzed not only the fight, but also the return of boxing to Los Angeles' Grand Olympic Auditorium. Goldman wrote that the Olympic "scored itself a victory, but only by split decision. The City of Angels could have used something more conclusive." De La Hoya knocked anonymous 130-pound beltholder Bredahl down in the first and second rounds, prompting a frustratingly defensive posture from the Danish southpaw the rest of the way. Oscar knocked him down again in the 10th, and the referee stopped the fight at the end of the round.

Also In This Issue: "The Metamorphosis Of Nigel Benn: From Crusher To Craftsman," by Brian Doogan ... "Larry Donald Outpoints Jeremy Williams: If These Are The Heavyweights Of The Future ... *Ugh!*", by Nigel Collins ... New Faces: Naseem Hamed ... Fighter of the Month: James Toney, who blew out challenger Tim Littles in four rounds.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number six at junior lightweight; Hopkins was number eight at middleweight.



Date: September 1995

Cover Photo: By Chris Farina

Cover Story: With his two-round destruction of highly regarded lightweight titlist Rafael Ruelas, De La Hoya earned the headline "Bona Fide Superstar! Oscar Is The Boxer For The '90s." Author Bernard Fernandez' piece delved into the uncharacteristic trash talk that the golf-playing "Golden Boy" elicited from Ruelas, as well as the details of the stunningly short fight. But perhaps most interesting were the comments of promoter Bob Arum, who had the foresight to speculate that De La Hoya's greatest payday would one day come at middleweight. Where Arum was wrong, however, was in thinking the megafight opponent would be none other than Dana Rosenblatt. "The dream fight for the biggest money of all-time is Oscar and Rosenblatt," said Arum. "That's what I think about when I go to sleep at night."

Also In This Issue: "The Return Of The American Fly: Danny Romero Makes Boxing History," by Steve Farhood ... "The Death Of A Lightweight Legend: Lou Ambers, 1913-1995," by Steve Farhood ... "An Open Letter To George Foreman: You Owe It To Yourself (And Boxing) To Get Out Now," by Nigel Collins ... Fighter of the Month: De La Hoya.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at lightweight and number five pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number two at middleweight.

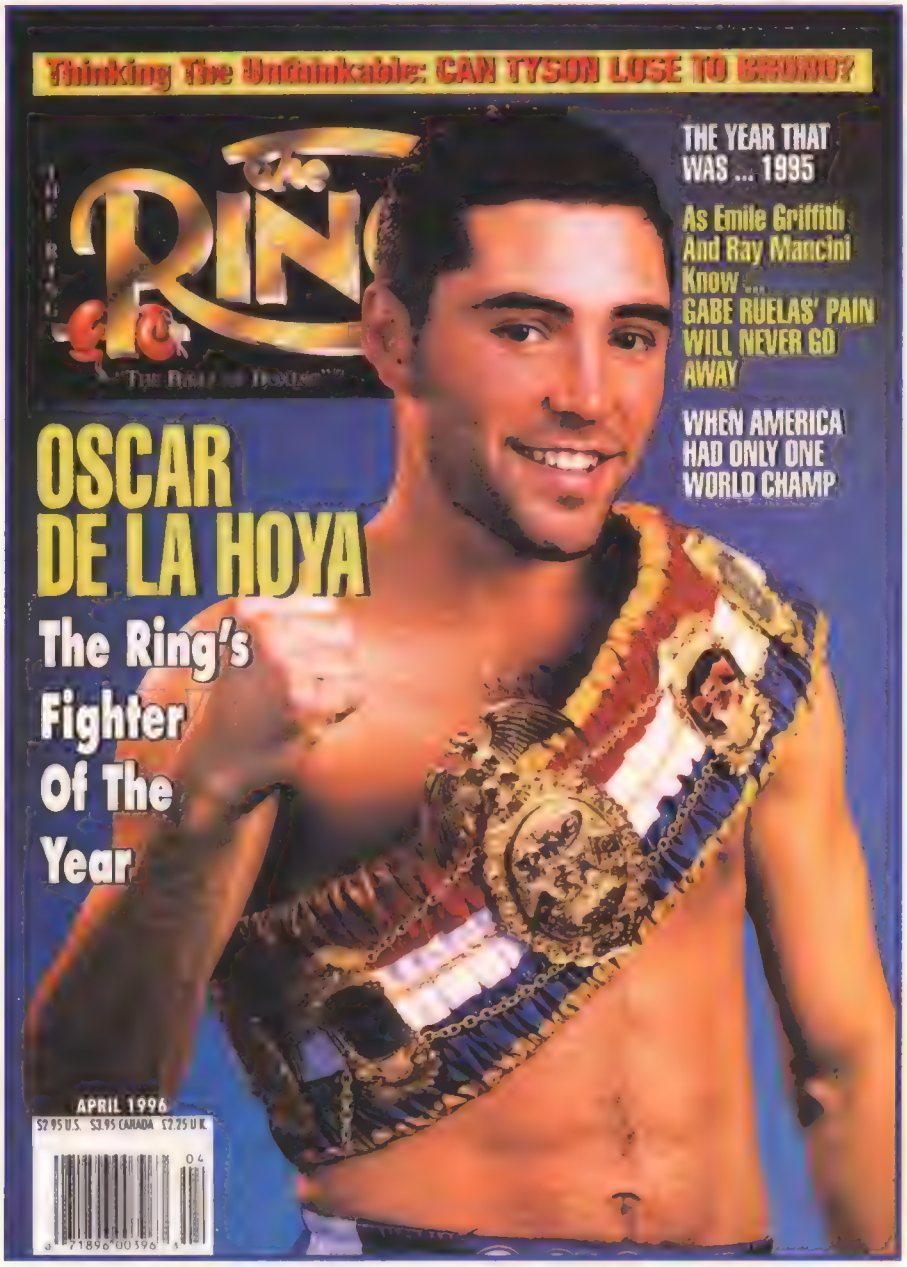
Date: January 1996

Cover Photo: By Chris Cassidy

Cover Story: Having just shattered Genaro Hernandez' nose on his way to a sixth-round TKO win, De La Hoya was preparing to finish his awesome 1995 campaign by taking on his fourth title-holder of the year. But unlike the other three, this fight with Jesse James Leija would not be in Oscar's home away from home, Las Vegas. In "The Leija-De La Hoya Showdown: If Oscar Can Make It In New York ...", writer Steve Farhood looked at both the quality of the matchup and the business decision to fight at Madison Square Garden. De La Hoya, though a huge star on the West Coast at just 22 years of age, still needed to build an East Coast fan base, and what better place to start than at the Garden? Plus, the opponent appeared perfect for "The Golden Boy"—four inches shorter, naturally lighter, exciting and respected, but undeniably outgunned.

Also In This Issue: "Chavez' Countdown To 100 Wins: Is It One Big Hoax?" by Nigel Collins ... "Frank Bruno & Chris Eubank: Opposites Moving In Opposite Directions," by Brian Doogan ... Fighter of the Month: Manuel Medina, who outpointed Alejandro Gonzalez to win his second featherweight title.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at lightweight and number four pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number three at middleweight.



Date: April 1996

Cover Photo: By Brent Cook

Cover Story: For the first (and only) time in his career, De La Hoya was named THE RING's Fighter of the Year, having beaten the fearsome foursome of John-John Molina, Rafael Ruelas, Genaro Hernandez, and Jesse James Leija in 1995. In "Fighter Of The Year Oscar De La Hoya: 'My Image Changes In The Ring'," Steve Farhood wrote about how "The Golden Boy" proved he could transform into an assassin once the bell rang. De La Hoya's year began with the difficult Molina fight, in which Oscar was roughed up en route to a decision win, and ended with the shockingly easy Leija fight, which was over in two rounds. Heading into 1996, attention was turning toward the biggest showdown of De La Hoya's young career, a meeting at junior welterweight with Mexican icon Julio Cesar Chavez.

Also In This Issue: "The Future Of Mike Tyson: The Five Questions That Must Be Answered," by Nigel Collins ... "As Emile Griffith And Ray Mancini Know, Gabe Ruelas' Pain Will Never Go Away," by Robert Cassidy ... New Faces: Joe Calzaghe ... Fighter of the Month: Azumah Nelson, who regained a 130-pound title from Gabe Ruelas.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at lightweight and number four pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number two at middleweight.

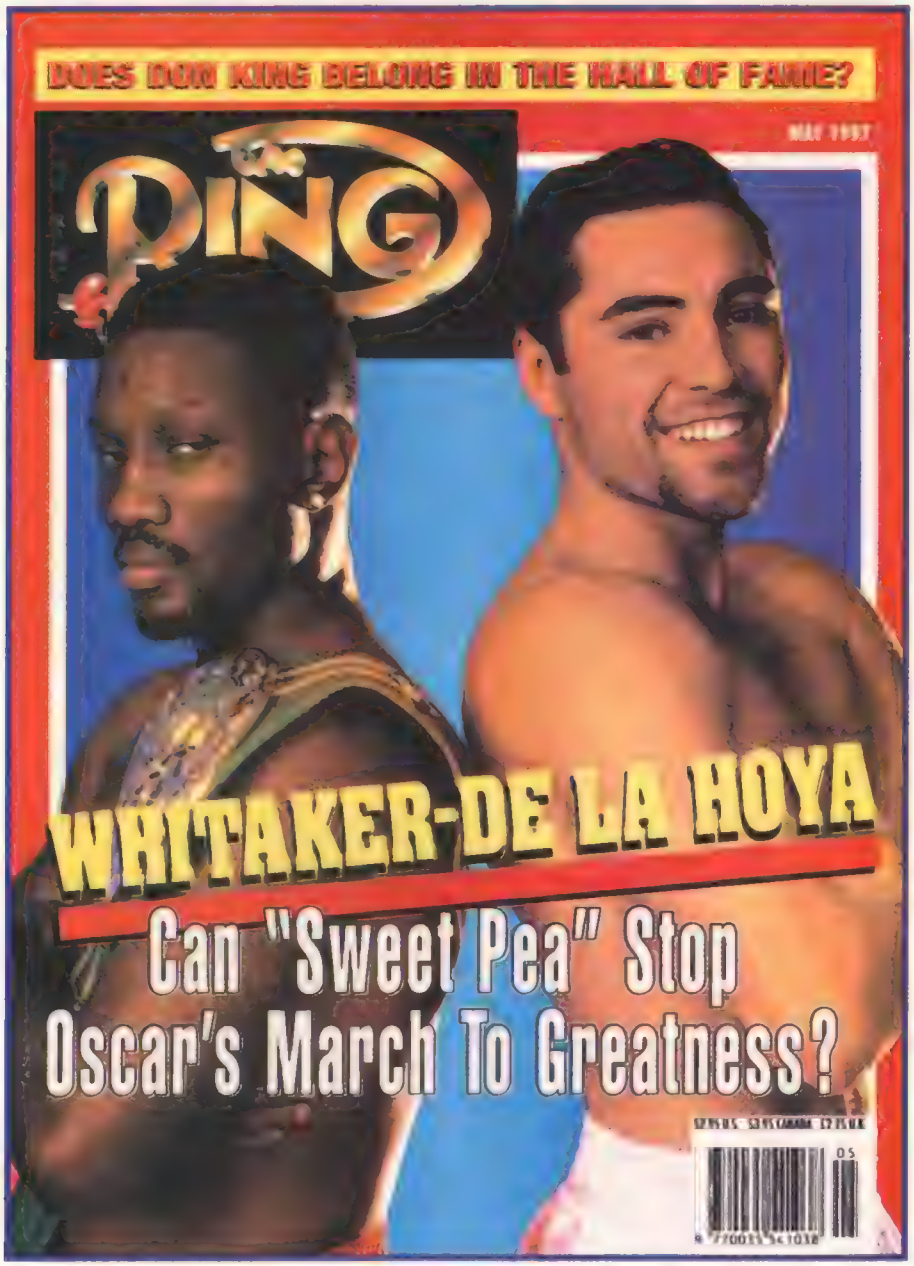
Date: October 1996

Cover Photo: By Stephen Dunn/Getty Images

Cover Story: In "Timing Is Everything ... And Oscar's Timing Is Perfect," Steve Farhood wrote about how De La Hoya seemed to come along at just the right time—and how the 33-year-old Julio Cesar Chavez was clearly in the wrong place at the wrong time when he was decimated in four bloody rounds by "The Golden Boy." Farhood wrote: "Thus far, at least, De La Hoya's career is evidence that who you fight sometimes isn't as important as when you fight him." Certainly, Chavez was well past his best when he entered the ring with De La Hoya, and Oscar used his jab to carve up the once-great champion. In a side-bar to the story, Jack Welsh looked at the betting on the super-fight, noting that it broke the Nevada record for a non-heavy-weight bout by attracting $32-million in wagers.

Also In This Issue: "Studying The Professor: What Makes Azumah Nelson So Great," by Nigel Collins ... "What's Good About Boxing ... And What's Bad," by Steve Farhood & Nigel Collins ... New Faces: Juan Manuel Marquez ... Fighter of the Month: Wilfredo Vazquez, who kayoed Eloy Rojas to become a three-division titlist.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior welterweight and number two pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.



Date: May 1997

Cover Photo: By Jason Ross Lavin

Cover Story: It's not often that two of the top three pound-for-pound fighters share the same ring, but when it does happen, it's the stuff of profitable magazine covers. In "Whitaker-De La Hoya: Can 'Sweet Pea' Stop Oscar's March To Greatness?", writer Mark Jacobs previewed the hotly anticipated superfight between the wily veteran and the soaring young star. Both had passed their tuneup tests—De La Hoya by jabbing his way to a masterful decision win over Miguel Angel Gonzalez, and Whitaker by coming from behind to knock out Diobelys Hurtado in the 11th round. Conventional wisdom made Oscar the favorite over the aging Whitaker, but most agreed he wouldn't have an easy time with the defensive master. Still, four out of five trainers polled in a sidebar to the article picked "The Golden Boy" to prevail.

Also In This Issue: "The Unlikely Comeback Of Junior Jones: 'He's Tasted The Bitter *And* The Sweet'," by Phil Berger ... "The Fittest Fighter In The Game: Everything's Working Out For Phillip Holiday," by Gavin Evans ... "Putting His Best Face Forward: Daniel Zaragoza Defuses 'The Pocket Rocket'," by Nigel Collins ... New Faces: Joel Casamayor ... Fighter of the Month: Zaragoza.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior welterweight and number two pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.

Date: August 1997

Cover Photo: By Al Bello/Getty Images

Cover Story: De La Hoya's unanimous decision win over welterweight king Pernell Whitaker was far from definitive, prompting Steve Farhood to pen the story "Oscar De La Hoya's Debt: Give Whitaker A Chance To Win Back His Belt." With his next three fights tentatively scheduled to come against the undeserving trio of David Kamau, Hector Camacho, and Patrick Charpentier, De La Hoya and his promoter, Bob Arum, were clearly taking the path of least resistance. As evidenced by the in-ring action, Whitaker was a puzzle that De La Hoya could not easily solve, despite what was suggested by the ridiculously wide scores in Oscar's favor. "I don't know why the judges waited so long to hand in their cards," remarked Whitaker cornerman Lou Duva. "They could've handed in their cards in the second round."

Also In This Issue: "Sugar Shane Mosley: Wait Till You Get A Taste Of This Lightweight!" by Douglass Fischer ... "Holyfield-Tyson II: The 10 Factors That Will Decide The Winner," by Robery Cassidy ... "Light Heavyweight Montell Griffin: On Or Off His Knees, He's Trouble For Roy Jones," by Steve Farhood ... Fighter of the Month: Genaro Hernandez, who refused to take a DQ win and instead beat Azumah Nelson by decision.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.

Date: September 1997

Cover Photos: De La Hoya and Pernell Whitaker by Jason Ross Lavin; Roy Jones by Chris Cassidy

Cover Story: We put 17 boxing experts on the spot with a tricky question at a tricky time: Who's number one, pound-for-pound? Those polled were primarily choosing between three fighters: De La Hoya, Whitaker, and Jones. But with De La Hoya and Whitaker having just waged an inconclusive tactical battle, and with Jones coming off a disqualification loss to Montell Griffin, many of the experts either declared the P-4-P title vacant, or named someone else entirely, such as Evander Holyfield or Ricardo Lopez. Interestingly, Junior Jones was both one of our experts (picking Roy Jones) and one of the possible P-4-P kings (in the opinion of boxing writer Wally Matthews).

Also In This Issue: "Terry Norris Braces For His Biggest Challenge: 'I Plan On Putting Trinidad Down'," by Nigel Collins ... Special Section: The 10 Greatest Punchers Of All-Time," by Mike Silver ... "Romero-Tapia Preview: The New Mexican Civil War ... In Las Vegas," by Dennis Latta ... New Faces: Vassiliy Jirov ... Fighter of the Month: George Foreman, coming off a win over Lou Savarese at the age of 48.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.

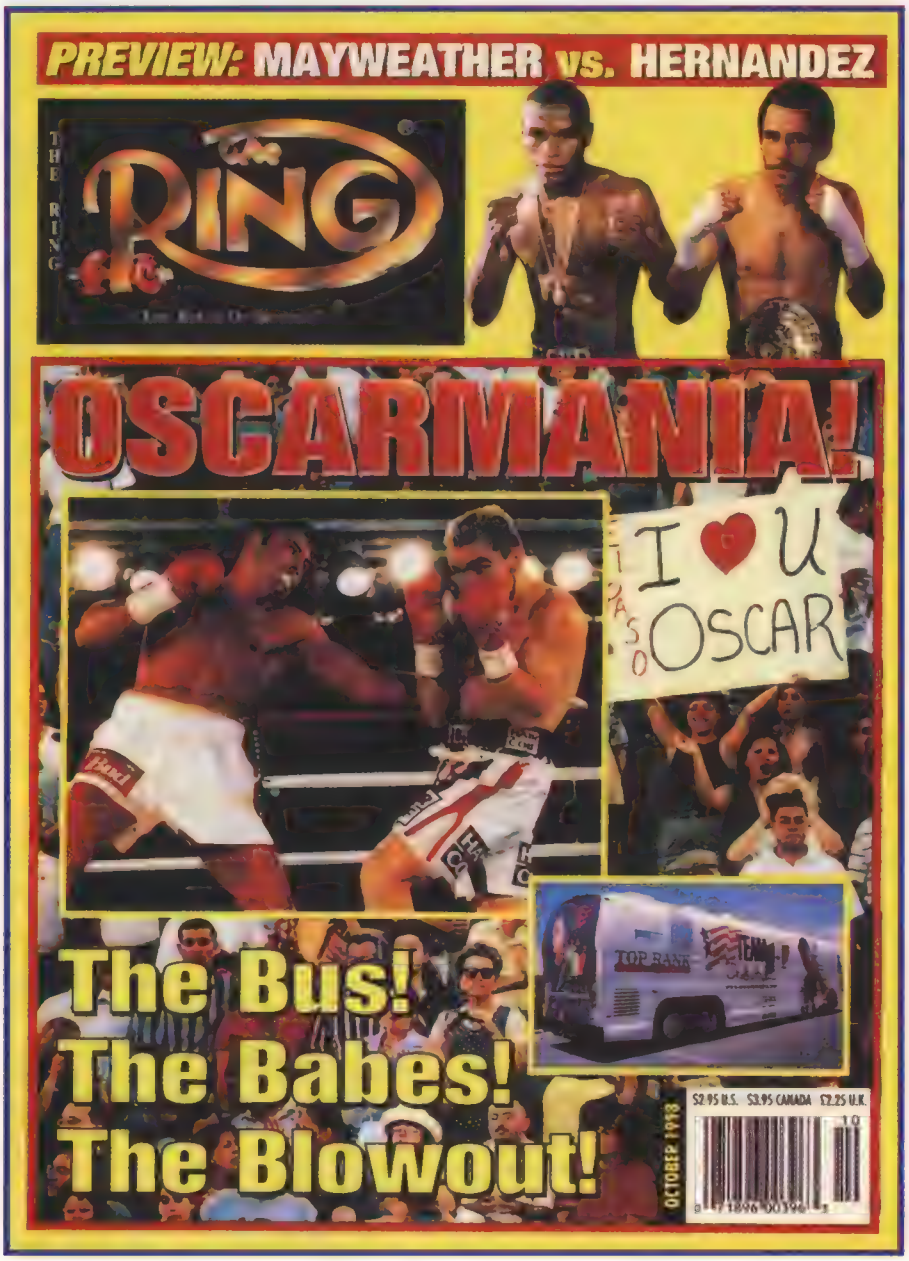
Date: January 1998

Cover Photo: By Andy Bernstein

Cover Story: Beating Hector Camacho wasn't exactly the crowning achievement of De La Hoya's career, but when tacked on to the list of other noteworthy fighters Oscar had already vanquished by age 24, it was undeniable that De La Hoya had serious substance and wasn't just a product of marketing and hype. Yet he remained the Rodney Dangerfield of boxing, as Ivan Goldman called him in his piece "Give This Man His Due! If You Can't Respect Oscar, You Can't Respect Anyone!" De La Hoya was criticized left and right, but the truth was that he was still growing into the welterweight division, and would have plenty of time to take on the dangerous likes of Ike Quartey, Felix Trinidad, and Terry Norris. As Goldman pointed out, nobody was preventing Quartey, Trinidad, and Norris from fighting each other in the meantime.

Also In This Issue: "WBC Super Bantam Champ Erik Morales: His Parents Are Still Waiting For Him To Get Beat Up," by Matthew Aguilar ... "Lucia Rijker: The Woman Who's Gonna Kick Christy's Butt!" by Tim Graham ... New Faces: Diego Corrales ... Fighter of the Month: Lou Del Valle, who stopped Eddy Smulders to win a vacant light heavyweight belt.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.



Date: October 1998

Cover Photos: Action, bus by Will Hart/HBO; crowd by Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images

Cover Story: He had become boxing's answer to The Beatles, a fighter so popular he could fill a stadium with screaming fans for a meaningless mismatch. De La Hoya drew a staggering crowd of more than 45,000 for his fight with unknown Frenchman Patrick Charpentier in El Paso, Texas, and Nigel Collins was there to witness "Oscarmania" at its wildest. In "Really Hard Punch, Really Soft Lips: Oscar Makes Legs Quiver In And Out Of The Ring," Collins analyzed both the Charpentier fight and the surreal scene. "The phenomenon of boxer as teen idol is unprecedented," Collins wrote, relaying stories of one weak-kneed woman after another being reduced nearly to tears by De La Hoya's presence.

Also In This Issue: "*Tuesday Night Fights*: A Look Back At Boxing's Longest Running TV Series," by William Dettloff ... "Mayweather vs. Hernandez: Has Dad Pushed Floyd To The Top ... Or Over The Edge?" by Eric Raskin ... Fighter of the Month: Hassine Cherifi, who scored an upset win over Keith Holmes for a middleweight belt.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight and number 10 pound-for-pound.

Date: November 1998

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Top Rank

Cover Story: In "Oscar De La Hoya vs. The All-Time Greats: How Would The Golden Boy Fare Against The Golden Oldies?", author William Dettloff ran through 10 mythical matchups pitting De La Hoya against the legends of the welterweight division. As in real life, where he eventually proved roughly equal to the greats of his time (Whitaker, Quartey, Trinidad, Mosley), De La Hoya went 5-5 against the 10 Hall of Famers. Dettloff picked Oscar to defeat Joe Walcott, Carmen Basilio, Wilfred Benitez, Tommy Hearns, and Sugar Ray Leonard, but had him losing to Mickey Walker, Henry Armstrong, Sugar Ray Robinson, Kid Gavilan, and Emile Griffith.

Also In This Issue: "His Olympic Failure Is A Distant Memory: Fernando Vargas Is 'Ferocious' As A Pro," by Eric Raskin ... "Junior Welter Prospect Cory Spinks: Learning By His Father's Mistakes," by Joe Santoliquito ... "For David Reid, There's No Place Like Home," by Nigel Collins ... New Faces: Paul Spadafora ... Fighter of the Month: Freddie Norwood, who made two featherweight title defenses in 27 days.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight and number 10 pound-for-pound.

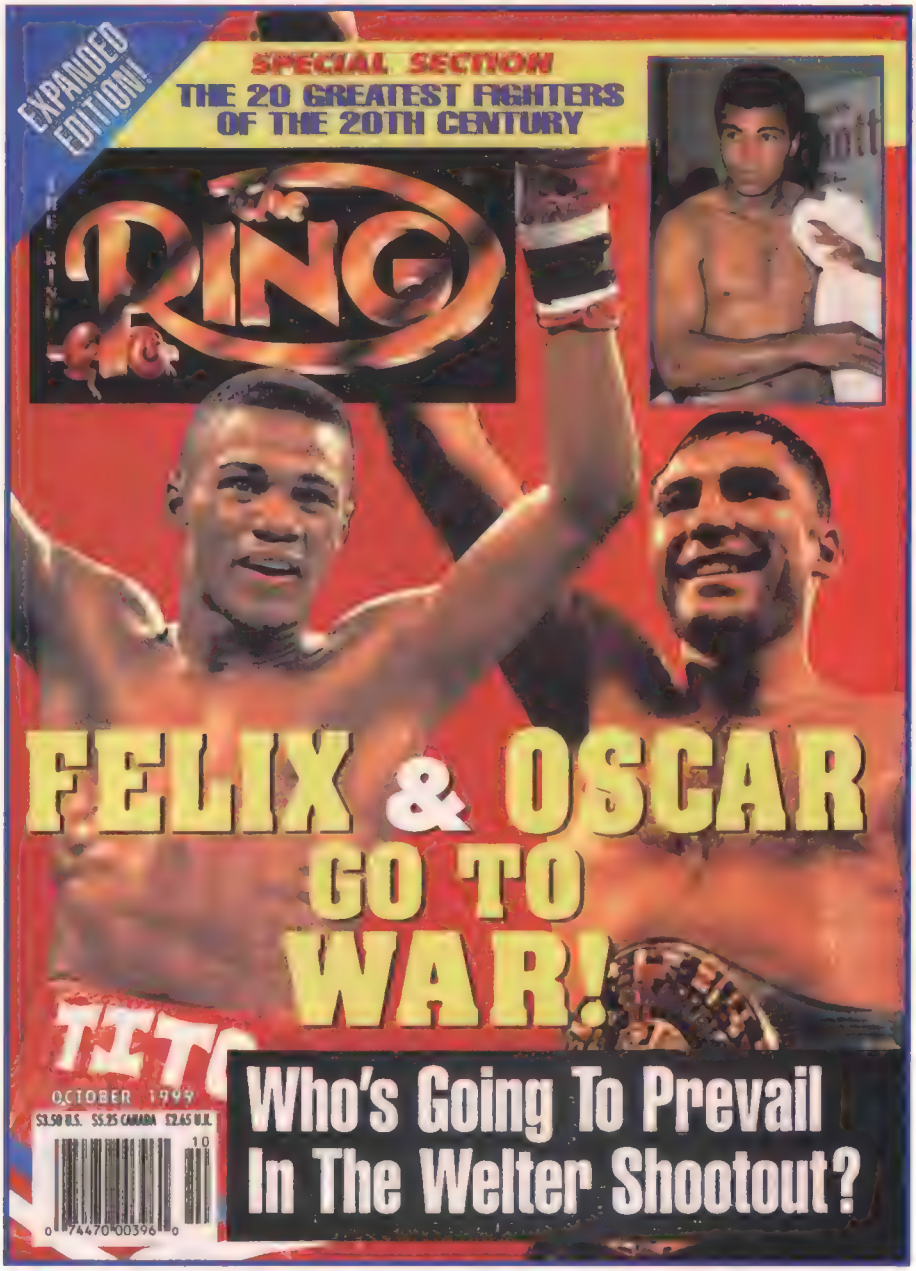
Date: March 1999

Cover Photo: By Andy Bernstein

Cover Story: Even those stubborn Oscar-haters who didn't consider any of his first 29 opponents dangerous had to admit that The Golden Boy was taking a major gamble in facing unbeaten Ike Quartey. In "De La Hoya vs. Quartey: Does Bazooka Have The Weapons To Shoot Down Oscar?", writer Nigel Collins explored the big pay-per-view showdown from all angles, and concluded that "Quartey is going to make it difficult, and hopefully exciting, but at some point, probably in the later rounds, he's going to get tagged—and hurt." Accompanying the story were three sidebars: one on De La Hoya's five greatest fights to that point, one on Quartey's five finest performances, and one featuring predictions from THE RING staff. Five of the seven staffers picked De La Hoya to prevail.

Also In This Issue: "Sugar Shane Mosley's Hit List: The Lightweight Champ Has A Heavy Agenda," by Robert Mladinich … "Ricardo Lopez-Rosendo Alvarez II: The Great Fight That Almost Didn't Happen," by Nigel Collins … "If A Wrestler Can Be Governor … Why Not A Pugilistic President?" by Ivan Goldman … Fighter of the Month: Lopez, who decisioned Alvarez in a thriller.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.



Date: October 1999

Cover Photos: De La Hoya by Jed Jacobsohn/Getty Images; Felix Trinidad by Al Bello/Getty Images

Cover Story: It was to be the highest-selling non-heavyweight pay-per-view fight of all-time, a clash of unbeaten superstars bigger than anything the welterweight division had seen since Sugar Ray Leonard-Tommy Hearns. Writer Ron Borges' "Felix And Oscar Go To War! Who's Going To Prevail In The Welter Shootout?" analyzed the battle that had the boxing world buzzing. Both had scored knockout wins in their late-spring tuneup bouts, De La Hoya by stopping Oba Carr in the 11th, Trinidad by walking through Hugo Pineda in four rounds. Interestingly, De La Hoya was promising a highly aggressive approach for the biggest fight of his career. "I'm not a boxer; I'm a slugger," he said. "I'm going back to what got me here."

Also In This Issue: "Special Section: The 20 Greatest Fighters Of The 20th Century," by William Dettloff … "A Void For Floyd: Where Does 'Pretty Boy' Go From Here?" by Ivan Goldman … "Junior Middleweight Harry Simon: No Longer Running From His Victims," by Brian Doogan … Fighter of the Month: Randall Bailey, who blew out Bolillo Gonzalez in just 41 seconds.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at welterweight and number one pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.

Date: February 2001

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Top Rank

Cover Story: After De La Hoya lost his welterweight title to Shane Mosley, many were saying it was the beginning of the end for The Golden Boy. THE RING didn't see it that way. In "It's Not Over For Oscar: THE RING's Five-Step Recovery Plan," Jeff Ryan outlined what De La Hoya had to do to get back to the top. But first, Ryan reminded everyone that two losses on a fighter's record didn't used to mean the end of the world. "But this is the era of pay-per-view," Ryan wrote, "when blemishes on the resume stand out like surgical scars on a swimsuit model." Therefore, a rebuilding project of sorts was necessary for Oscar, and Ryan laid out the blueprint.

Also In This Issue: "No Golden Boys: U.S. Team Shut Out At Olympics For First Time In 52 Years," by D.E. Thomas ... "Bob's Bummer! Can Arum Bounce Back From His 12 Months In Hell?" by Kevin Iole ... "Who's Next? The Fighters Most Likely To Be P-4-P King," by Eric Raskin ... Fighter of the Month: Diego Corrales, fresh off a three-round beatdown of Angel Manfredy.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number two at welterweight and number four pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight.

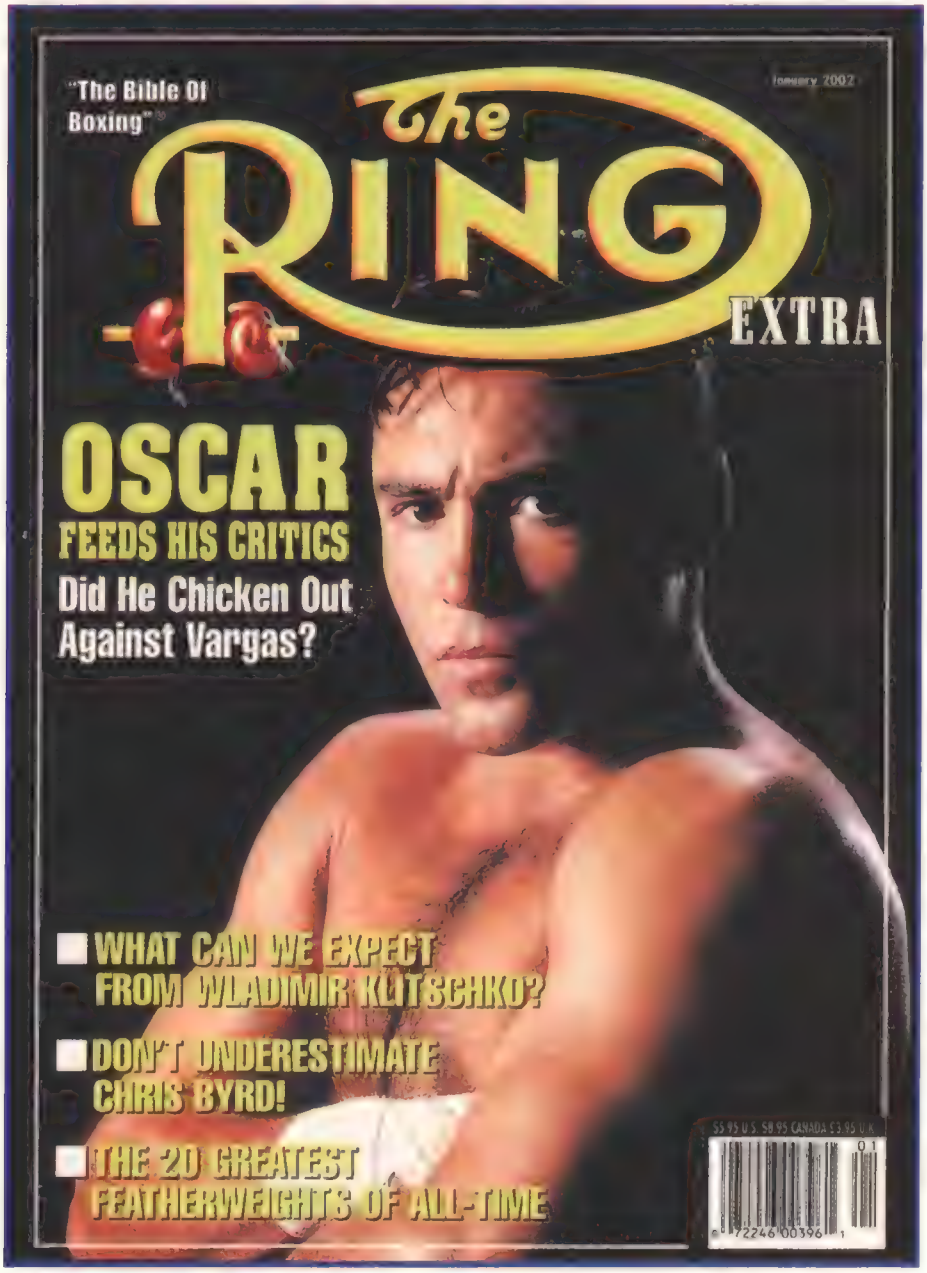
Date: October 2001

Cover Photos: Hopkins by Mark W. Hill; Felix Trinidad courtesy of HBO

Cover Story: For his long-awaited first RING cover, Hopkins was really just a supporting character, an expected foil for the stampeding Trinidad on his run to immortality. Nigel Collins previewed the 160-pound unification showdown in "Trinidad vs. Hopkins: The Biggest Middleweight Fight Since Leonard-Hagler," noting that Trinidad would certainly be the betting favorite, but that "it would be foolish to dismiss Hopkins out of hand." With "Tito" coming off a breathtaking demolition of William Joppy, the momentum was on his side, but the thinking was that if Hopkins' chin could do what Joppy's and countless others' couldn't—withstand Trinidad's power—then "The Executioner" just might have a chance. The story was accompanied by a sidebar on trainers Felix Trinidad Sr. and Bouie Fisher, plus a poll of 20 insiders, 15 of whom picked Trinidad to win.

Also In This Issue: "'King Me,' Says Rahman: Inside Boxing's Ultimate Checkers Game," by Johnnie Whitehead … "'Let's See What's In Roy Jones' Heart': Can Joe Calzaghe Provide The Answer?" by Brian Doogan … Fighter of the Month: Trinidad.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number two at welterweight and number six pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight and number seven pound-for-pound.



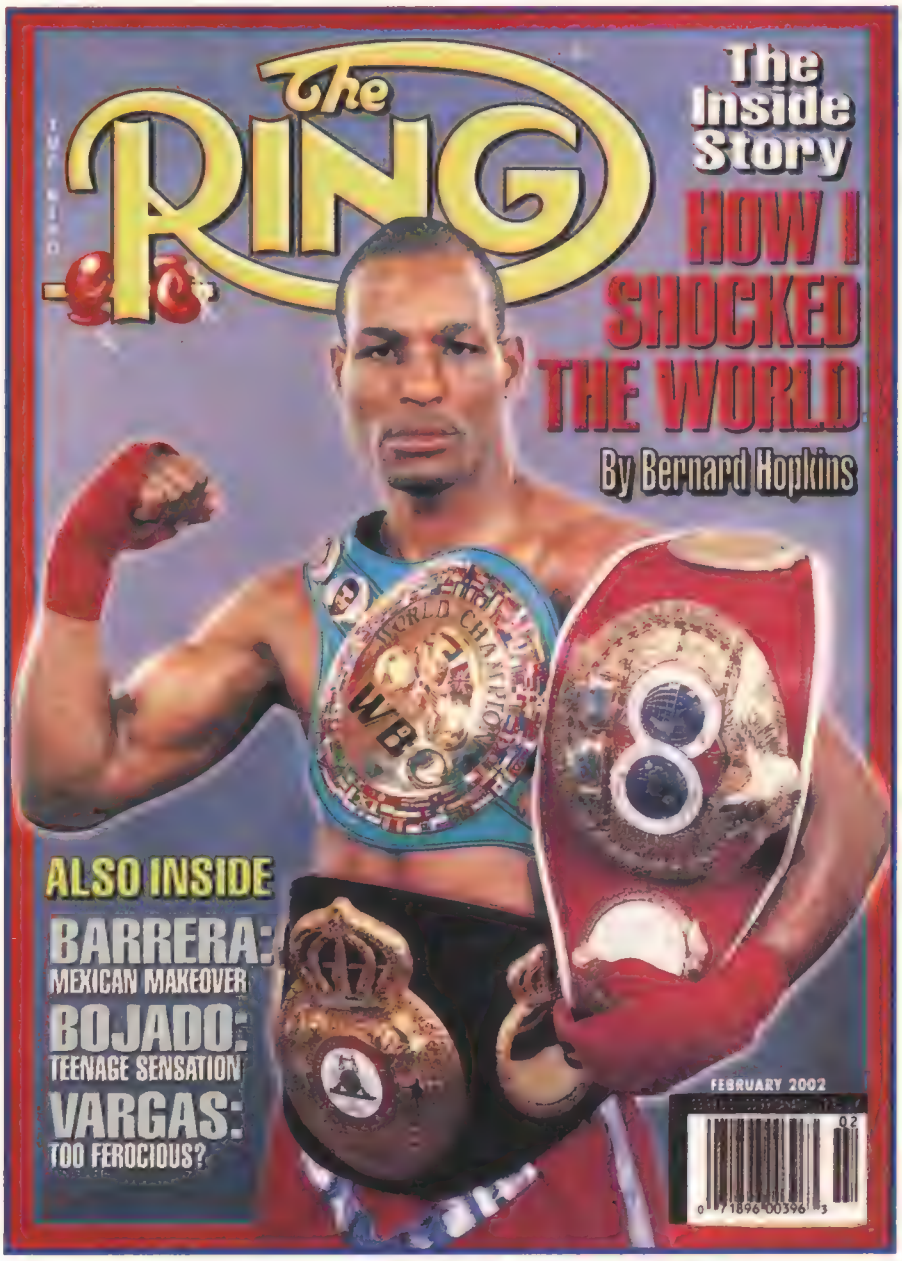
Date: January 2002

Cover Photo: By Greg Gorman/HBO

Cover Story: Most of our stories on De La Hoya over the years have been positive, but not this one, William Dettloff's "Oscar Feeds His Critics: Did He Chicken Out Against Vargas?" De La Hoya, who had just recently moved up to junior middleweight, was all set to take on hated rival Fernando Vargas in a true fight fan's fight, then balked at the last minute and said he was going to face mandatory no-hoper Roman Karmazin instead. This move had the Oscar-bashers taking numbers, ripping De La Hoya for not backing up his arrogance. De La Hoya's former trainer Emanuel Steward had a different take: "I heard it was because Oscar didn't have boxing guys negotiating for him and his guy was out-negotiated by Vargas' guy," Steward told THE RING. "So they just killed it, and they'll make it again later."

Also In This Issue: "What Can We Expect From Wladimir Klitschko? 20 Experts State Their Views" ... "More Hawk Than Dove: Don't Underestimate Chris Byrd," by Kevin Iole ... "The 20 Greatest Featherweights Of All-Time," by William Dettloff ... New Faces: Ricky Hatton ... Fighter of the Month: Byrd, who upset David Tua over 12 masterful rounds.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior middleweight and number six pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight and number seven pound-for-pound.



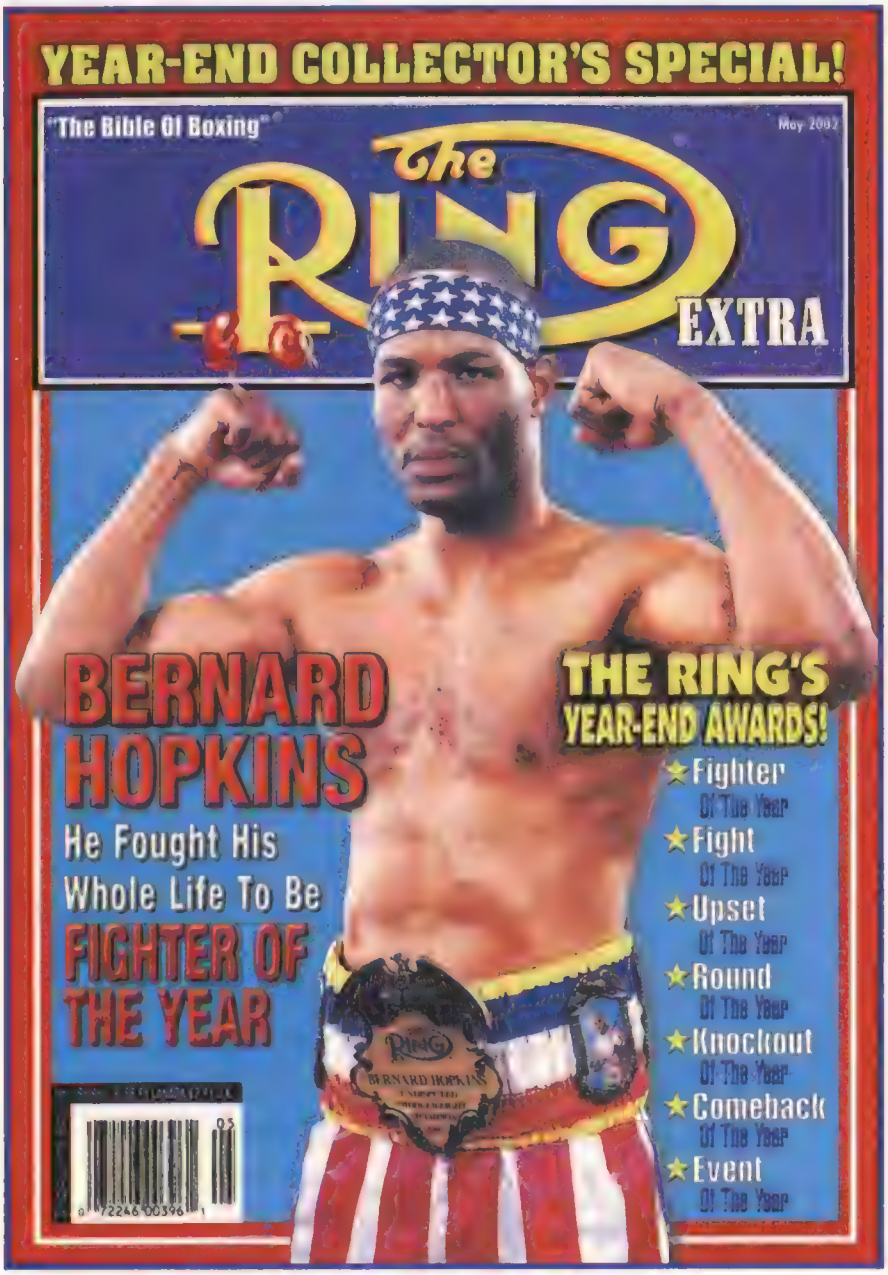
Date: February 2002

Cover Photo: By Bruce MacNabb

Cover Story: Nobody could have written a better story about Hopkins' amazing 12th-round knockout win over Felix Trinidad than The Executioner himself. "The Inside Story: How I Shocked The World" was a fascinating first-hand look into the mind of the undisputed middleweight champion, the man who made it from the penitentiary to the pinnacle. Hopkins wrote about the negotiations ("Don King put all his eggs in one basket. He just *knew* Trinidad was going to beat me"), the riot in San Juan ("It reminded you of a horror movie"), and of course, the fight itself ("By the shocked look on his face, I knew he was thinking, *This guy isn't supposed to be moving*"). Hopkins spoiled the plans of Trinidad, King, HBO, and Madison Square Garden, and became a superstar in the process.

Also In This Issue: "Mexican Makeover: Born Again As A Boxer, Barrera's Better Than Ever!" by William Dettloff ... "Vargas Gives The Fans What They Want ... But Is He Too Ferocious For His Own Good?" by Jeff Ryan ... "Teenage Sensation Francisco Bojado: Is He As Good As Everybody Thinks?" by Kevin Iole ... Fighter of the Month: Hopkins.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior middleweight and number seven pound-for-pound; Hopkins was number one at middleweight and number two pound-for-pound.



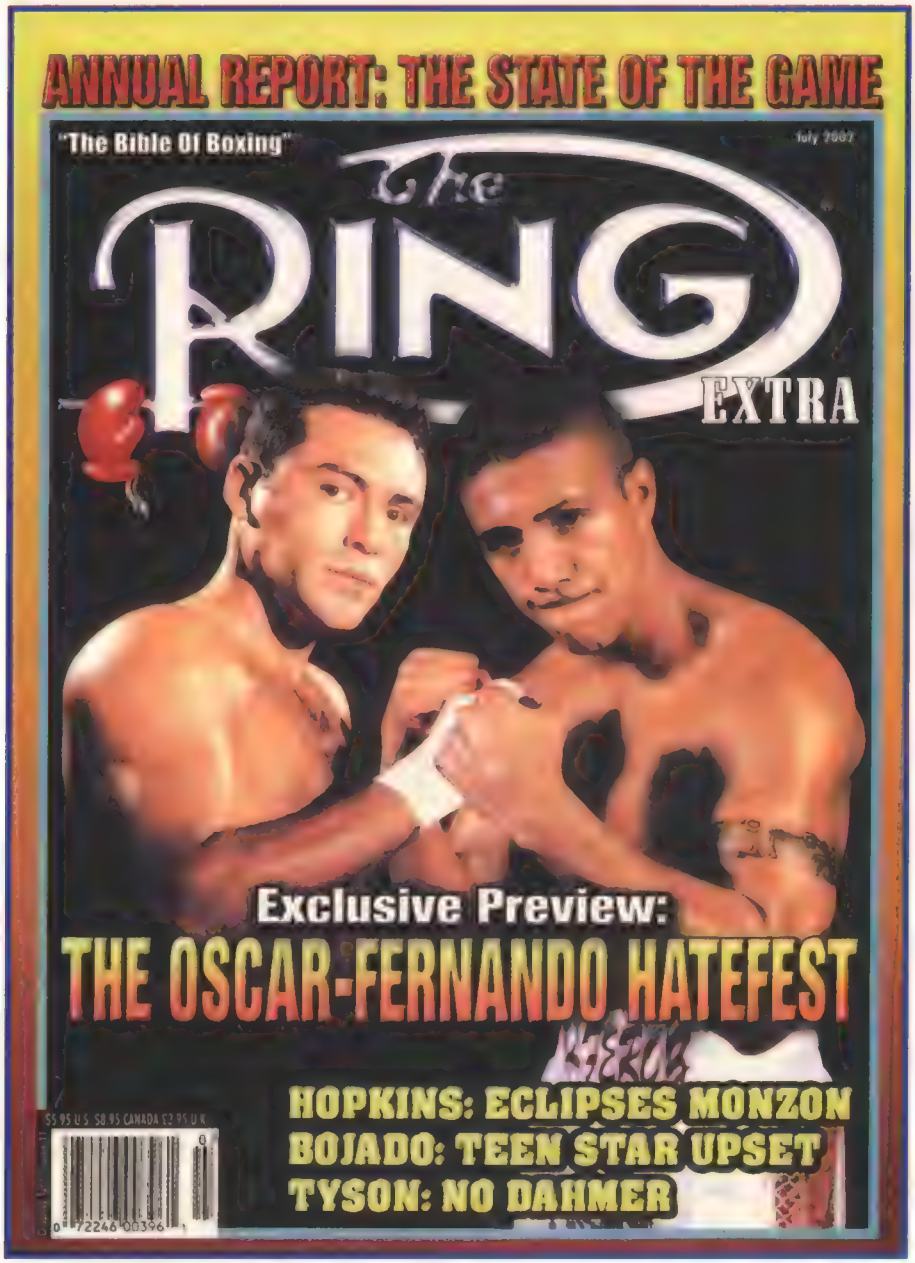
Date: May 2002

Cover Photo: By Bruce MacNabb

Cover Story: The straight-forward headline on the story—"Fighter of the Year: Bernard Hopkins"—says it all. Hopkins soared to another level in 2001, easily outpointing Keith Holmes to unify two of the alphabet belts at middleweight, then putting on one of the most artful pugilistic displays ever in breaking down Felix Trinidad. Although Kostya Tszyu, Marco Antonio Barrera, and Floyd Mayweather all had superlative years as well, selecting Hopkins was "about as close to a no-brainer as these things get."

Also In This Issue: The rest of the year-end awards were as follows: Fight of the Year, Micky Ward W 10 Emanuel Burton; Round of the Year, Hopkins-Trinidad Round 10; Knockout of the Year, Lennox Lewis KO 4 Hasim Rahman; Upset of the Year, Rahman KO 5 Lewis; Comeback of the Year, John Michael Johnson; Event of the Year, Middleweight World Championship Series ... "Progress Report: The 2000 U.S. Olympic Team," by Kevin Iole ... "Eric Harding's Mission: A More Exciting Career, A Less Exciting Life," by Johnnie Whitehead ... Fighter of the Month: Jameel McCline, who easily upset Lance "GOOFi" Whitaker.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior middleweight and number seven pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number two pound-for-pound.



Date: July 2002

Cover Photo: De La Hoya by Andy Bernstein/Top Rank; Fernando Vargas by Chris Farina

Cover Story: In "Fernando & Oscar's 'Love'-Hate Relationship: All Emotions Will Be Put In Motion!", writer Ivan Goldman discussed how the De La Hoya-Vargas superfight would probably come down to intangibles, as opposed to pure fighting ability. "The issues of drama, hatred, pride, and fear so overwhelm this match that they obliterate the usual comparisons of one fighter versus another," Goldman wrote. De La Hoya got under Vargas' skin by saying that the ever-macho "El Feroz" was in love with him, and some were predicting that the hot-headed Vargas would lose control and make a mistake during the fight. This was a grudge match in the truest sense, a battle between two fighters with genuine loathing for one another—and it was also to be Oscar's first real test at 154 pounds.

Also In This Issue: "The State Of The Game: Our Exclusive Annual Report," by William Dettloff … "Hopkins Topples Monzon … Without Laying A Glove On Him!" by Nigel Collins … "The Upset Epidemic: Who's Next To Go?" by Eric Raskin … Fighter of the Month: Vernon Forrest, who upended pound-for-pound king Shane Mosley.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number one at junior middleweight and number eight pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number one pound-for-pound.

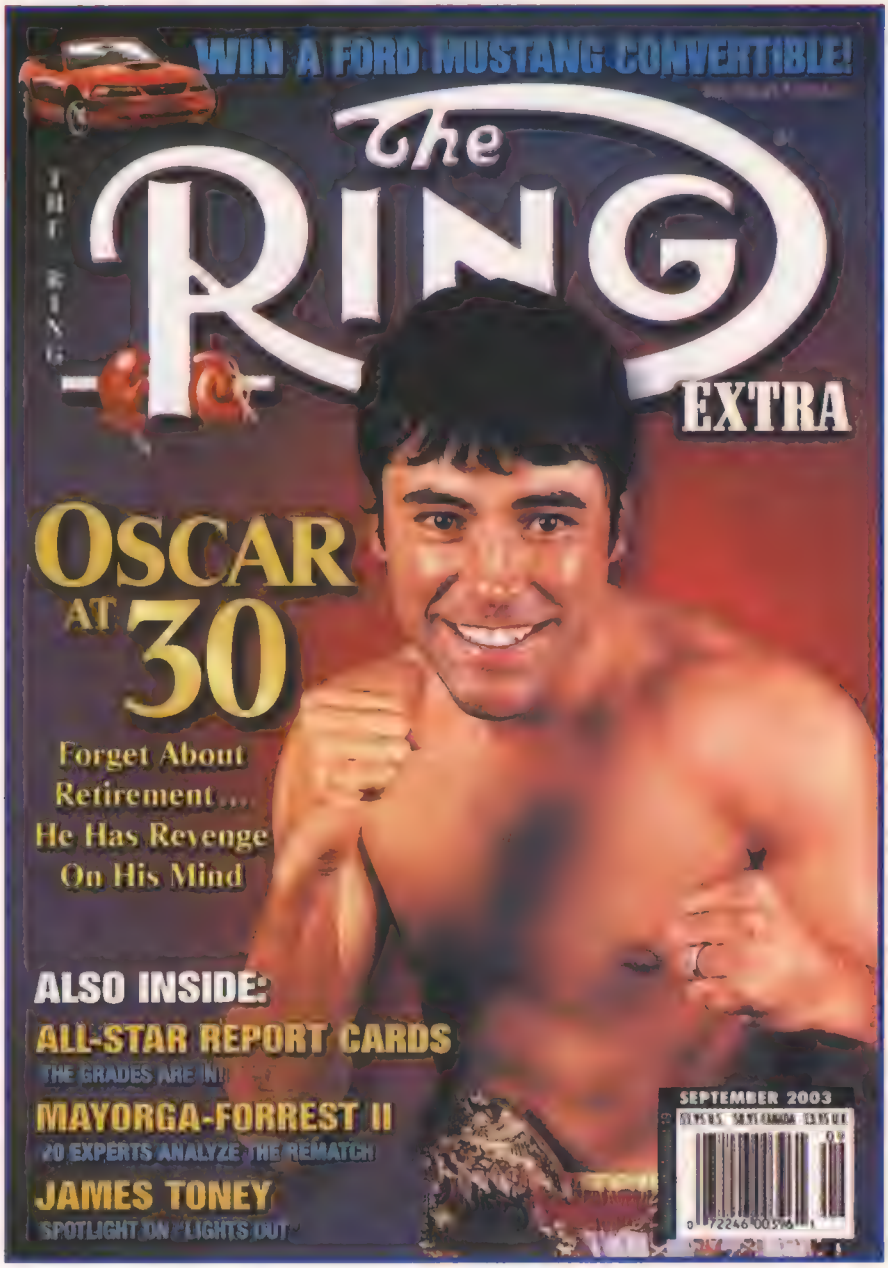
Date: January 2003

Cover Photo: By Will Hart/HBO

Cover Story: At age 29 and about 20 pounds over what was generally believed to be his best weight, De La Hoya came through with a career-best performance in knocking out Fernando Vargas. In "The Golden Boy Proves His Manhood: Is Oscar's Prime Just Beginning?", writer Eric Raskin looked at how De La Hoya got in touch with his Mexican side to kick his seemingly fading boxing career back into high gear. "With several superfights still to be fought," Raskin wrote, "boxing's number-one draw below heavyweight isn't ready to trade in something he's so magnificent at for a life as a run-of-the-mill singer or a less-than-run-of-the-mill actor." The story also contained a sidebar asking Oscar to give number-one contender Winky Wright a shot at THE RING title.

Also In This Issue: "Paulie Ayala vs. Erik Morales: No Grudge Match, Just A Great Match," by Ivan Goldman ... "Special Section: Boxing's Most Overrated & Underrated," by William Dettloff ... "The Resurrection Of David Tua: This Time, Pride Comes After A Fall," by Joe Santoliquito ... New Faces: Juan Diaz ... Fighter of the Month: Miguel Barrera, who defeated Roberto Leyva in a strawweight thriller.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was THE RING champion at junior middleweight and number five pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number one pound-for-pound.



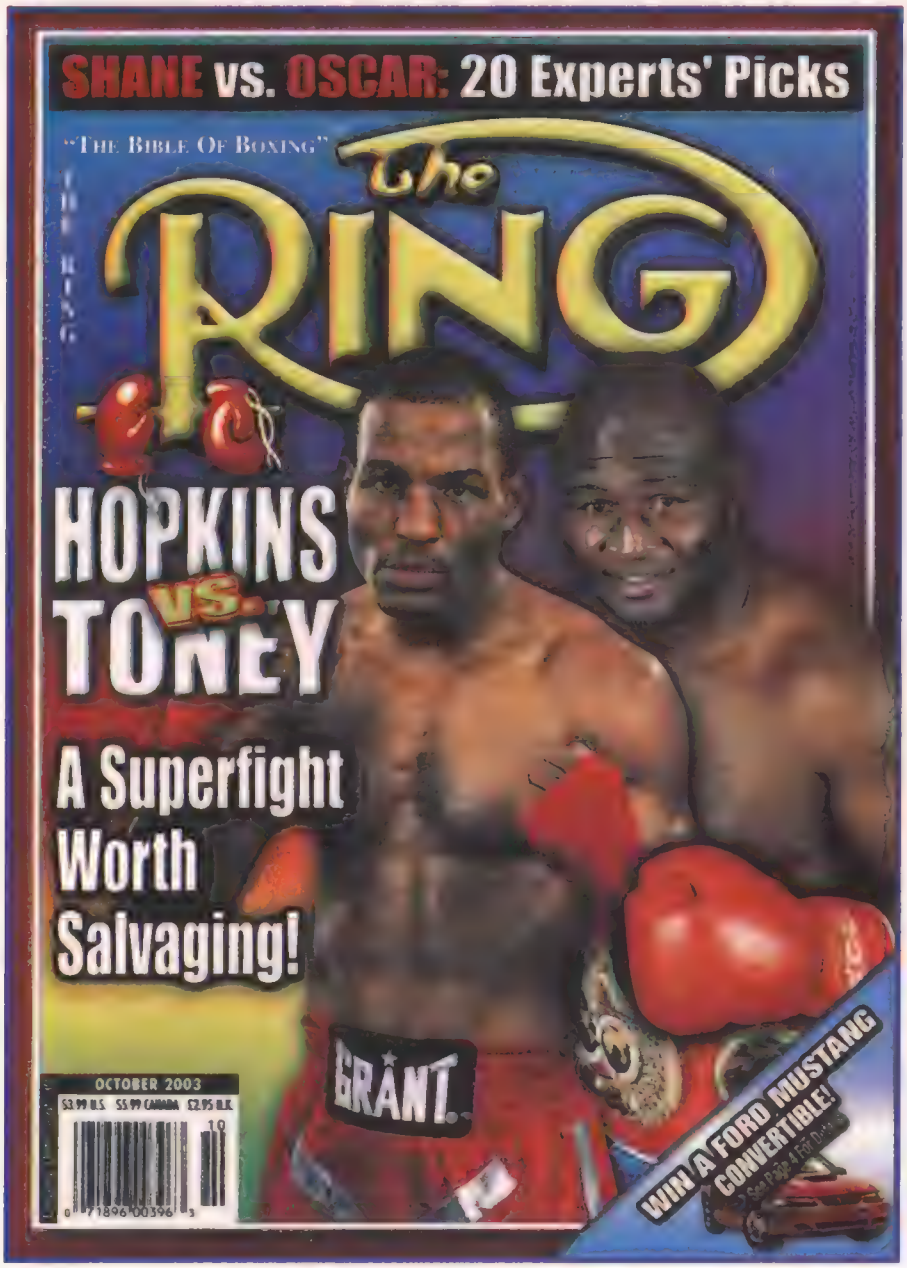
Date: September 2003

Cover Photo: By Jan Sanders

Cover Story: For years, De La Hoya told us all he'd be retired at 30. It didn't quite turn out that way. In "Oscar At 30: Forget About Retirement ... He Has Revenge On His Mind," Joe Santoliquito observed that De La Hoya, coming off an easy win over Yory Boy Campas, was more content than at any time in his life. "All the planets are aligned for me," De La Hoya told THE RING. "I'm doing something that I love and I'm sharing it with my wife, so it doesn't get any better than that." De La Hoya spoke extensively about his two primary motivations for continuing to fight: Shane Mosley and Felix Trinidad. De La Hoya said he didn't want to walk away from the game until his defeats to those two fighters were avenged.

Also In This Issue: "Was Mayorga-Forrest A Fluke? 20 Experts Analyze The Rematch" ... "All-Star Report Cards: THE RING Grades Boxing's Elite," by Nigel Collins & Eric Raskin ... "The Spotlight Shines On 'Lights Out': James Toney Makes It Worth The Weight," by Ted Bodenrader ... Fighter of the Month: Toney, who downed previously unbeaten Vassiliy Jirov for a cruiserweight title.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was THE RING champion at junior middleweight and number four pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number two pound-for-pound.



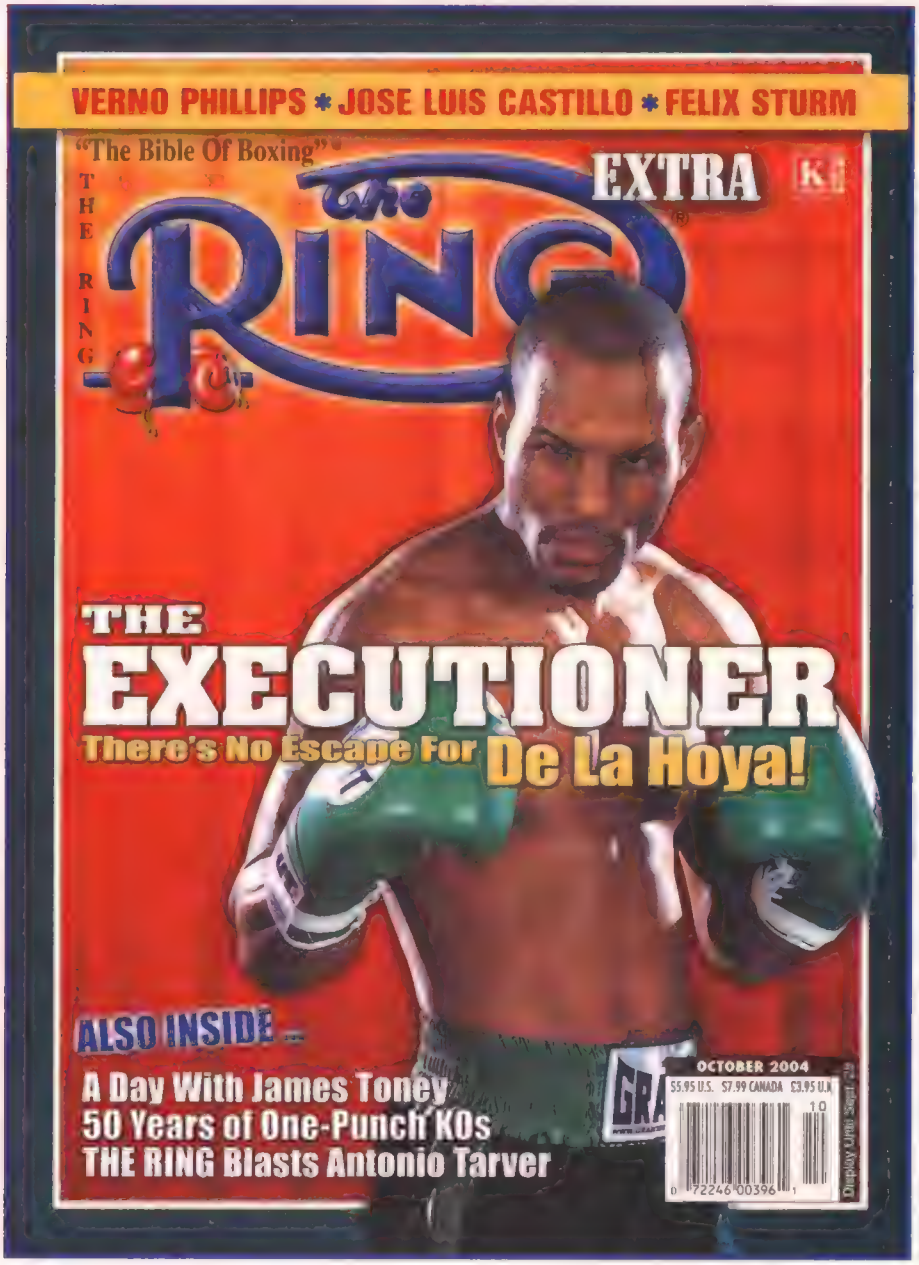
Date: October 2003

Cover Photo: Hopkins by Bruce MacNabb; James Toney by Jan Sanders

Cover Story: An early deadline and a late cancellation rendered this issue's cover story, "James Toney vs. Bernard Hopkins: The Ghost Of Superfights Past," null and void before it hit the newsstands. The match had been a natural, pitting a pair of old-school warriors in an intriguing catchweight bout. As William Dettloff wrote, it was "not just a relic of the past; it's the sort of creative matchmaking that can pump new interest and energy into the game." But alas, the fight fell apart when a financial agreement couldn't be reached, and fans never got to see what would have been both an enthralling showdown between two of the most accomplished fighters of the era—and the world championship of trash talk.

Also In This Issue: "Oscar vs. Shane: Reversal Or Replay? 20 Experts Decide" ... "The Next Great Middleweight? Bronze Medalist Jermain Taylor Closing In On Pro Gold" by David Mayo ... "Bravest Of the Brave: The 10 Biggest Hearts in Boxing" by Brian Doogan ... Fighter of the Month: Hard-luck veteran Glencoffe Johnson finally won a big one, outpointing Eric Harding.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was THE RING champion at junior middleweight and number four pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number two pound-for-pound.



Date: October 2004

Cover Photo: By Craig Blankenhorn/HBO

Cover Story: The June 5 doubleheader featuring De La Hoya vs. Felix Sturm and Hopkins vs. Robert Allen was supposed to showcase both De La Hoya and Hopkins in a positive light and serve as a pay-per-view "infomercial" for their September showdown. But the unheralded Sturm gave Oscar such a tough fight compared to Hopkins' comprehensive decision over Allen, that De La Hoya's chances of winning the middleweight championship looked even slimmer after the doubleheader than going in. "Oscar Awaits Execution: His Golden Neck Is On The Chopping Block Against Hopkins" by Bernard Fernandez was an emphatic endorsement of Hopkins and predicted a stoppage victory for the Philly tough guy.

Also In This Issue: "A Lights Out Day In La-La Land: James Toney Takes Us For A Ride" by Ivan Goldman ... "New Lightweight King Jose Luis Castillo: With Mayweather Gone, Can Anybody Stop Him?" by Don Stradley ... "One-Punch And It's Over: A Half-Century Of Memorable Knockouts" by Gavin Evans ... Fighter of the Month: Castillo, who had just beaten Juan Lazcano to win the vacant lightweight championship.

Where They Ranked: De La Hoya was number two at middleweight and number nine pound-for-pound; Hopkins was THE RING champion at middleweight and number one pound-for-pound. ■

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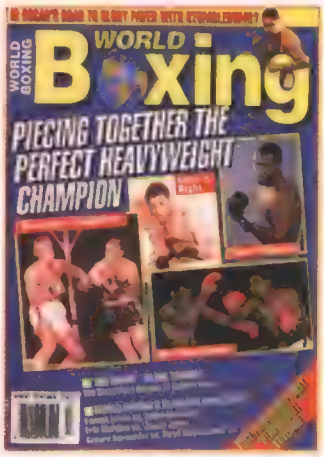

Fall 1998

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Floyd Mayweather Sr. doesn't exactly guarantee an Oscar De La Hoya victory when he meets world middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins, but feels "The Golden Boy" has a good chance to win if follows his game plan.

WHY OSCAR DE LA HOYA WILL WIN

"Oscar has to believe he can win, first. If he didn't think he could win, he wouldn't have brought the fight to Bernard. Oscar brought the fight to Bernard ... That says a lot to me."

PHOTO BY CARLO ALLEGRI/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya is going to have to keep Hopkins at the end of his jab all night, according to Mayweather. The Golden Boy did a good job of that in certain spots against Felix Sturm.

By Floyd Mayweather Sr.

Bernard Hopkins is not invincible. He's not unbeatable. He is beatable. If my fighter feels he can win, I feel he can win. I'm going to tell you right now, Oscar will win the fight if he follows my game plan, and he has to follow it to a T. If Oscar follows the game plan, Hopkins will have problems. You can take a horse to water, you just can't make him drink. I know exactly what has to be done, and if Oscar does that, he wins the fight.

The things that Oscar has, he uses to the best of his ability. Oscar is capable of winning the fight because he has the hand speed and foot speed to beat Bernard Hopkins. Overall, he's a better jabber than Hopkins. He's going to have to keep Hopkins at the end of his jab and move around. I don't mean literally run, but the motion to move whenever it's necessary. He has to do a lot of feints and a lot of walking and jabbing. That's the game plan.

The jab is the name of the game. He's going to have to work the jab up and down, using it overtime. He has to double-jab, triple-jab, feint-jab, and throw a hook jab and a spear jab. The jab is the whole key to this thing. It's the whole key to boxing, period. You can beat a guy to death with the jab, and use a jab to keep a guy off of you. It opens different avenues for what you want to do. We'll need jabs and feints. Those are the best things you can do in boxing.

We'll use some footwork, but not a lot. If Hopkins gets close, we'll need to swing and get out of the way. I'll stress to Oscar that he has to bend his knees a little; use a lot of fakes, make Hopkins think a lot of things are coming that aren't coming. I'll say this right here: Anything can happen in a fight, it's warfare.

I know people are saying this is like Sugar Ray Leonard and Marvin Hagler. It's not. Oscar doesn't need to do what Leonard did against Hagler, because you have two different structures of men. Hagler was short, stocky like a brick wall; Hopkins is tall and lean and uses great leverage. Oscar needs to fight hard and get inside, then get outside if he gets trapped. He'll have to

PHOTO BY MARTY ROSENGARTEN

Mayweather wants De La Hoya to pattern his fight against Hopkins the same way he fought against Felix Trinidad the first nine rounds, moving and scoring (left)—not running if he thinks he's ahead, as Oscar did in the late rounds against Trinidad (below left).

make Hopkins think and fill his head with all kinds of nonsense.

We'll do some little things different. I want Oscar to pattern himself after Oscar De La Hoya and the fight he fought against Felix Trinidad. I don't want him to use the Mayweather roll, I want him to keep his hands up, his hands up good and high, because Hopkins does throw a lot of right hands. I want Oscar to fight his own game plan. Use his legs and box, but he just don't have to move that much. If Bernard crosses him, he'll have to use a bounce a little. My thing is not to let Oscar give up.

Oscar's fight with Sturm, anyone could have a bad fight. We're all human and you step up on that podium, and for some reason or another, you just weren't right that night. I'll be honest. As a trainer, I think Oscar was in shape for the Sturm fight, but I also know that the week of the Sturm fight, he had to go to a chiropractor. One day, he was hurting so bad at the gym, I just told him to take the day off. He went to the chiropractor, he came back the next day, and he said he felt fine.

I wanted Oscar to jump on Sturm. He jumped on Sturm, but not the way I wanted. I wanted him to run off his punches, slipping and sliding and working off the jab. But Sturm countered Oscar, and Oscar wasn't moving his head. I had to believe that for Oscar not to move his head, his lower back was hurting him. I can only say what I saw. Oscar never told me about his back during the fight; he just said that he couldn't move his head. It could have been because of his back. I don't know if that's the case, because I'm not a doctor. People can look at what they want. People can't look at Oscar training. He's been in great shape.

I know some people question whether or not Oscar was in shape. You have to be in shape to throw as many punches as Oscar

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Mayweather said De La Hoya was in shape for the Sturm fight. But just prior to fighting Sturm, Mayweather sent De La Hoya home one day from the gym because his fighter was experiencing back problems.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Mayweather respects middleweight champion Hopkins, but also says "The Executioner" is showing signs of age. Noted Mayweather: "If you notice the way Hopkins is today, if you look at his fights, Hopkins throws no more than one or two punches at a time."

threw. I don't think it was so much a matter with conditioning, maybe just that Oscar never learned to pace himself. In the time I've been training him, I never saw Oscar fatigue. You didn't see any fatigue in Oscar when he beat Fernando Vargas. How the hell could the man be tired when he was strong in the 11th round. It can't be anything but a mind thing.

My position with Oscar is to strategize the fight, get a good game plan for Oscar to come out, and execute it. I will make sure that De La Hoya's body is fit, not just in shape. In the time I've been with Oscar in camp, I haven't come across many people who work harder than Oscar.

Not to take anything away from Bernard Hopkins, because he's proven himself over the years. But the middleweight division isn't what it used to be when Carlos Monzon and Marvin Hagler were fighting. Hopkins is a tough guy. I won't dispute any of that. I'm not saying Hopkins will get old, but it can happen. This is a huge hurdle for Oscar, maybe the biggest hurdle of his career.

I kept asking Oscar what was wrong with him during the Sturm fight, why didn't he move his head. He can't stand there and do that against Hopkins. He can't and he won't.

If you notice the way Hopkins is today, if you look at his fights, Hopkins throws no more than one or two punches at a time. He might throw a big right hand or a hooker right hand, but he's no longer a combination puncher. He's easier to hit. Whatever strategy he used, he did it right against Allen. But Hopkins fought a guy who was scared to death. Robert Allen went into the ring like he saw the boogie man. He wasn't trying to win any fight. He was just there to survive.

There wasn't anything to learn about Hopkins from that. It was a brave man against a scared man. Hopkins' age might just set in the night he fights Oscar. And Oscar can make it happen. Oscar can make Hopkins feel his age.

Oscar is going to have stay busier than Hopkins. That's going to be a key for us. He's a younger man and he *should* be busier than Hopkins. If Oscar is in shape and Hopkins is in shape, Oscar will be able to go longer because he's younger. Oscar will need to attack the older man's body, but mainly we'll stay on the outside. Any opportunity he gets, we want to go to the body, and keep that jab in Hopkins' face.

Sturm didn't wilt under that assault. But we didn't know what Sturm could take. Sturm might have been a really tough guy. How do we know Hopkins could have stopped Sturm? Sturm showed that he was tough, and Hopkins doesn't punch like a Hagler or a Monzon. Hopkins can punch, don't get me wrong. But Sturm was in good physical shape.

I know what people are saying. I know not many are giving us a chance. People always say other people are crazy in life, but after you do something, they find out you're not that crazy after all. If we didn't take chances in life, we wouldn't be where we are today. If we didn't take any chances, we wouldn't have airplanes flying around. People challenge life all the time. Oscar just feels right about this.

It's like anything else. Very few people thought Sugar Ray Leonard could beat Hagler, and we're in the millennium of the upsets right now. Oscar has to believe he can win, first. If he didn't think he could win, he wouldn't have brought the fight to Bernard. Oscar brought the fight to Bernard, and that says something. That says a lot to me. It tells me that Oscar feels somehow, someway, he can win.

As his trainer, I believe. I'm a winner. I don't like losing. Oscar just feels something. Oscar is a winner. He wouldn't do something without thinking he can win. Oscar De La Hoya will beat Bernard Hopkins. Oscar can win. He will prevail. ■

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

The mere fact that De La Hoya sought this fight proves to his trainer that he has a firm belief in himself. If he also believes in his trainer's game plan and executes it flawlessly, Mayweather foresees Oscar's hand being raised for the 38th time in his career.

The last time the team of Bouie Fisher and Bernard Hopkins lost a fight was in 1993, a 12-round decision to Roy Jones. Since then, Hopkins has surpassed Jones as the number-one pound-for-pound fighter in the world.

PHOTO BY MARK W. HILL

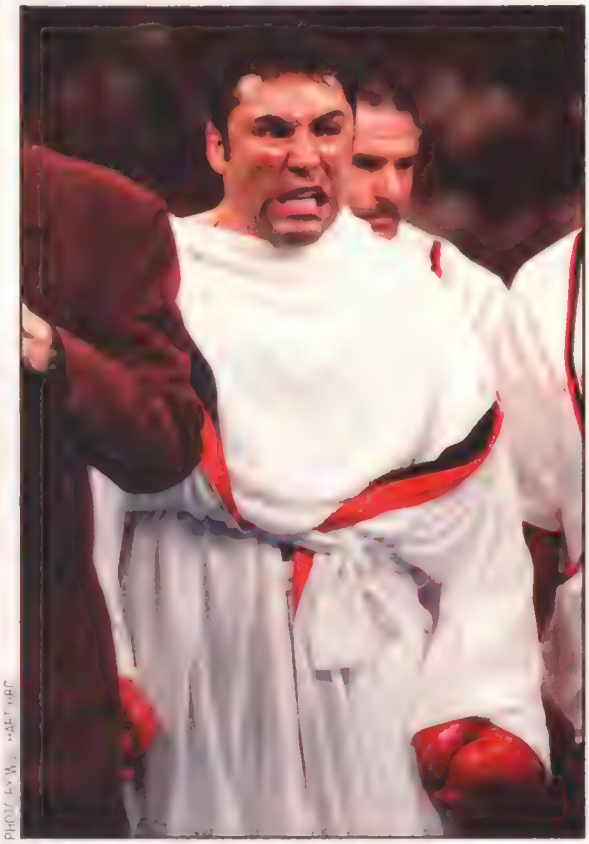
WHY BERNARD HOPKINS WILL WIN

"We're getting ready to fight a lion that has plenty of heart. You can't overlook anything. We have to be ready, with two or three plans and two or three different styles that we're going to use, if necessary."

By Bouie Fisher

People have ideas that Bernard Hopkins is going to walk through Oscar De La Hoya. But we're not looking for that. We're looking for a competitive fight. If you go out thinking you're just going to walk through someone, it's not going to happen. We're not going to fight Oscar De La Hoya, but a lion, a tiger, a guy that can punch, a guy who is very educated in the ring, who has plenty of experience, who has heart and a good corner.

You can't overlook anything with Oscar De La Hoya. Oscar can box. He can punch a little bit. He's very smart and very crafty. He takes a good punch. So what you have to do is not play him cheap. It's not going to be a walk-over fight. Not at all.



In preparing Hopkins, Fisher said they won't underestimate De La Hoya. Though he knows otherwise, Fisher wants his camp to approach the fight with an underdog's mentality.

What we have to do is to continue to go the way we've been going, stick to a fight plan and study the fight like we've always done, knowing that Oscar and his team will most certainly be doing the same thing. We have to come with a better plan than what Oscar has. What that plan is no one knows. We'll reveal that the night of the fight.

What concerns me about De La Hoya is that he took the fight. If he took this, he just didn't take it because he just wants to get out there for another fight. They see something. So what we're going to do is try to make what they think they see nothing but an optical illusion.

We shouldn't have too many problems, but we expect the worst. So if the worst comes, we'll just have to knuckle down and handle the worst. We don't have any major concerns as far as Oscar, but we want Oscar to do all of those things he can do, because that will bring out the best in Bernard Hopkins.

Right now, Bernard has been more relaxed than he's been in the past few fights. He's beginning to show more of the things we've been looking for throughout his career. But sometimes, Bernard tries to do too much. It's not about doing too much, just getting the job done.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Fisher is concerned about the fact that "The Golden Boy" took the fight in the first place. Maybe De La Hoya sees something in Hopkins that they can exploit.

Like in the Joppy fight. Our team has studied that fight several different times. We've seen where things could have been different. But Bernard was so set in trying to get the guy out of there that he overshot the runway in certain spots. But come Oscar De La Hoya, we're going to try to go through the runway, not around it or over it. We have to go through it in order to win.

Bernard Hopkins has to approach De La Hoya the same way Marvin Hagler approached Sugar Ray Leonard. Mainly, stick to our game plan. See, I'm repeating game plan, but I should be saying game *plans*. If you only have one plan and that isn't working, you don't have too much going for you.

Bernard Hopkins is a good puncher, and De La Hoya can punch. He can most certainly hurt Bernard, because De La Hoya has some knockouts in some fights that you never thought he would have won by knockout. I've seen De La Hoya take shots that would have gotten the average guy out of there and come back with counter shots, two or three at a time. I'm not really concerned with what I saw from De La Hoya against Felix Sturm. We studied that fight, round by round. Oscar won rounds no one really thought he won. Late in that fight, Oscar was getting hit by shots, but he was also countering and he did enough to win the fight.

I throw that fight away. I'm not even thinking about the Sturm fight. I'm thinking about Oscar De La Hoya and Bernard Hopkins.

Since the Sturm fight, all I've been doing is studying fights. I'll wake up at three o'clock in the morning and put a tape in and look at certain rounds. I see what the results were in certain rounds, and see what De La Hoya's stamina was like in the latter part of fights.

This is a test. Oscar De La Hoya is a big guy, much bigger than people think he is, but he's been able to get down to the lower weights. Bernard is a throwback to the old fighters. He can make 157, he can come in at 160, he can come in at 154. What we're going to do is come in at a comfortable weight. We haven't decided where or what that weight is going to be, but it's going to be in our favor, put it that way.

You'll see different strategies, like we did against Felix Trinidad. We heard Trinidad this and Trinidad that, that he takes a good shot and he can punch. But he has to find something to hit. If you're beating him to the punch, and you're countering him when he's missing, regardless of how hard he can punch, he's going to get frustrated.

Trinidad landed some decent shots and Bernard came right back. He tried to do certain things on the inside, and Hopkins came right back. He tried things from the outside, Hopkins came right back. Whatever he tried, we had an answer for that. So Trinidad got frustrated.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Fisher studies tape constantly. Though Hopkins looked impressive in his victory over William Joppy, "The Executioner" was so intent on knocking out Joppy that he "overshot the runway," according to the veteran trainer. It's a mistake they can't repeat against De La Hoya.

Fisher heard all about the punching power of Felix Trinidad, but, he pointed out, "Tito" first had to find something to hit, and when he couldn't against Hopkins, he grew frustrated. Fisher hopes to employ the same strategy against De La Hoya.

Their main thing then was to hit Bernard with a shot to get him out of there, but those are the shots that you never land. The execution of our fight plan was close to perfect. I don't think Trinidad won a round, because we had a solid plan. We focused on countering the shot. Regardless of the punch thrown, counter the shot.

This will be Bernard's most interesting challenge. I already think we had our toughest challenge when we beat Trinidad. Oscar punches sharp and he punches fast. It's not the big punches that hurt you, but the punches that hit the target. We have to be concerned about that. Once again I'll say it, and I'll say it until the fight is over: We're getting ready to fight a lion that has plenty of heart. You can't overlook anything. We have to be ready, with two or three plans and two or three different styles that we're going to use, if necessary.

They'll adjust round by round and they won't fight the same fight they did against Sturm. We'll adjust to what we need and we're not going to wait until the fight to figure it out. I was looking at fight tapes every day, three months before the fight.

I'll give up some secrets here, but I don't care. I can call Bernard Hopkins up, or he might call me, at any hour of the day or night, and we'll look at a certain fight. We'll go through certain things and why the fight didn't go the way we wanted it to go, and study by phone together, so it's even better when we're face-to-face. When we're in camp, the tape goes on at five in the morning. We'll look at the fight 300, a thousand times.

Bernard Hopkins is a complete fighter. He's the best fighter in the world. He can do something of everything. At this stage of his career, Bernard still watches tape. Bernard works hard as hell, and he's back in the gym seven, eight days after a fight. He's never satisfied. I try to hold him back and try not to let him do too much, because Bernard wants to work.

The media and the fight fans and outside people are doing all the talking about us being unbeatable. Everyone is trying to rock us to sleep, but I'm not sleepy. I take this fight as if we're still the underdog, because if we go into this fight with our chins stuck out, we're giving up something. We're getting ready to fight a fighter who can knock guys out, but I like the role we're in. I want to prove the fact that the critics are right for once. We're getting ready to fight a lion, and a lion can damn sure hurt you.

From Day One, Bernard Hopkins has been the underdog. He's been the underdog his whole life. Twenty years from now, my grandchildren and fight fans all over the world, they'll see a legend, Bernard Hopkins. I'm just happy to be in a position to be a part of this. Remember, everyone is beatable. But who's going to beat Bernard Hopkins? No one in the world right now. ■

Fisher said the Trinidad fight was the most challenging for Team Hopkins from a planning perspective. But Hopkins enjoyed a decisive victory, and many experts believe the same result will befall De La Hoya. "Everyone is beatable," Fisher warned. "But who's going to beat Bernard Hopkins?"

SUPERFIGHT PREDICTIONS

20 Experts Weigh In On The DE LA HOYA-HOPKINS Showdown

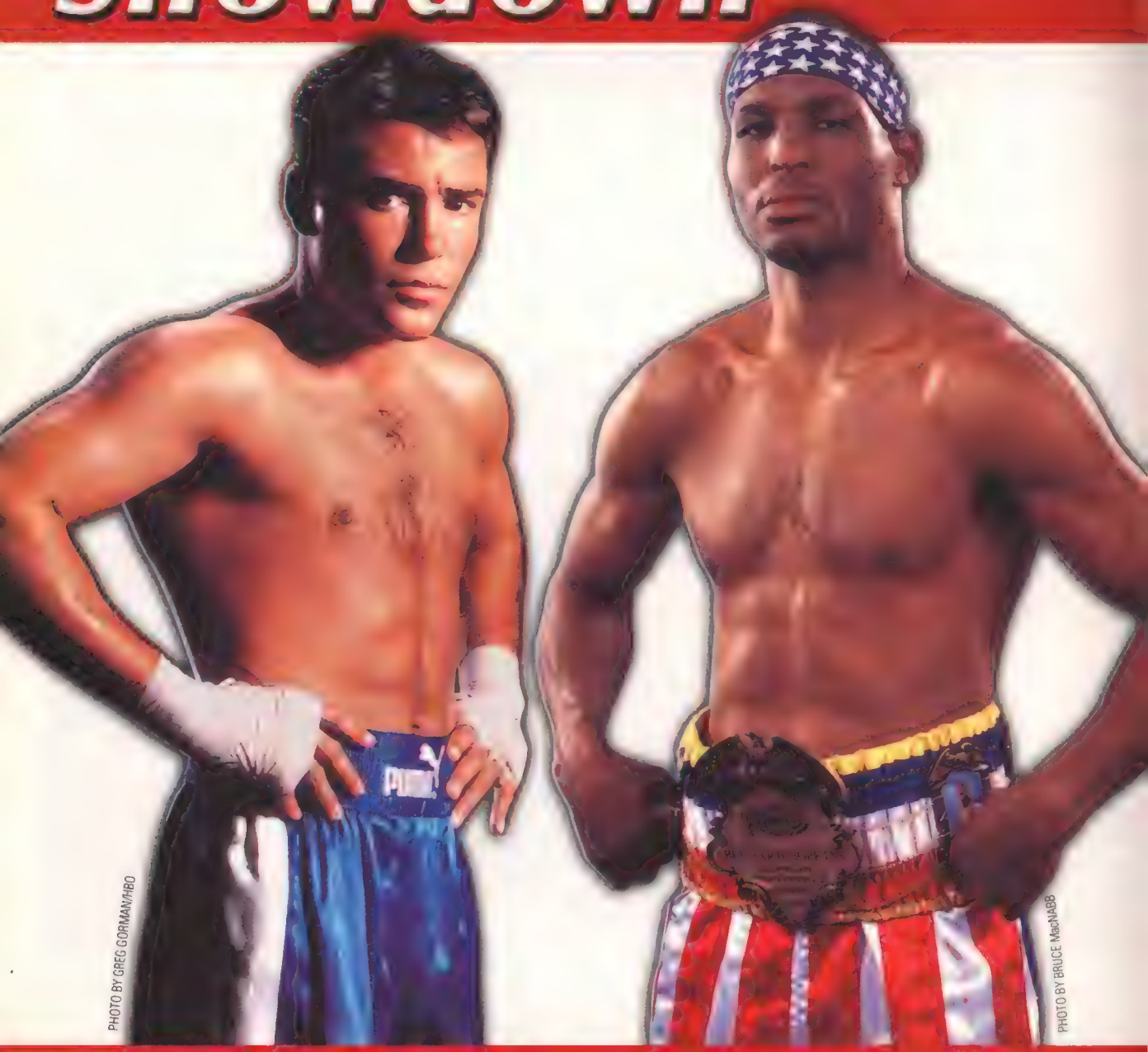


PHOTO BY GREG GORMAN/HBO

PHOTO BY BRUCE McNABB

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya's lackluster performance against Felix Sturm caused many experts to question whether Oscar has any chance of beating world middleweight champion Hopkins. Certainly, though, De La Hoya will be more focused for Hopkins than he was for Sturm.

Compiled by Joe Santoliquito

Boxing fans were licking their chops at the possibilities: Oscar De La Hoya, coming up from junior middleweight, announced he'd be stepping into the ring with world middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins. Everyone agreed this was going to be the richest non-heavyweight prize fight of all-time. And the possibilities of what might happen in the ring were numerous.

Then came the June 5 doubleheader, meant to build up interest in the September 18 showdown. Hopkins did what he was supposed to do, winning easily (if not all that memorably) over Robert Allen. But De La Hoya, looking pudgy in his middleweight debut, received a big scare from anonymous foe Felix Sturm before winning a close, unanimous decision.

Overnight, "The Golden Boy" went from a very live underdog to a no-hoper in the minds of many. The same people who once gave him a reasonable chance at winning suddenly expected him to get his butt kicked by Hopkins in much the same way Felix Trinidad did three years ago.

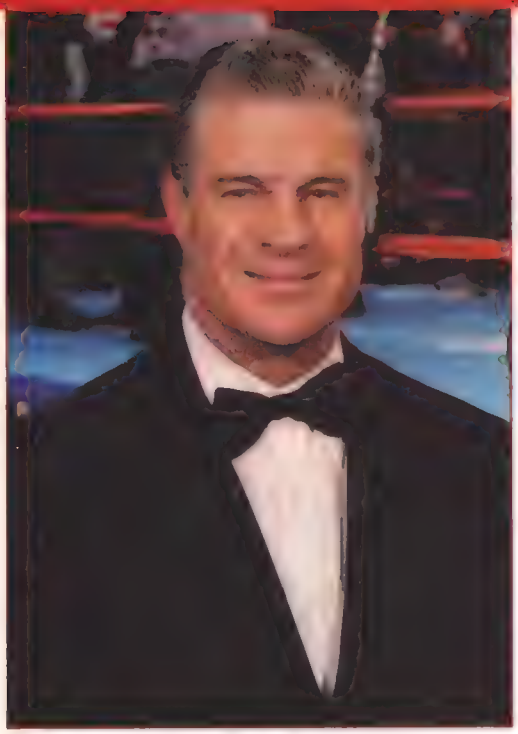
Still, there are reasons to believe this might turn out to be the classic battle the boxing world is hoping for. De La Hoya admitted he took Sturm lightly. When in shape and on his toes, The Golden Boy is an entirely different fighter. And who is to say Hopkins won't hit the wall overnight? Isn't it possible that what we saw from him against Allen was the very best he can produce at age 39?

It's not as hot a debate as it once appeared. But it's still a fight that has everyone in the boxing community talking. Here's what 20 experts had to say in response to the question: Who will win the Hopkins-De La Hoya world middleweight championship fight and why?

JIM LAMPLEY (*HBO blow-by-blow announcer*): "I've sometimes been accused of being too pro-Oscar, and it's been absolutely true that I've always admired his skills and thought he was robbed in two fights, but if you added up all the roots of praise that I've heaped on him in over 30 fights that I've covered, that wouldn't be enough to help him in this one. Oscar is in too deep against a taller, stronger fighter. I also think that Bernard is capable of limiting the pace of the fight to his desire, and the aggression that Oscar would have to mount to speed it up would put him in harm's way. I see Hopkins winning a clear, harshly punitive, unanimous decision. I do think Oscar will make it to the finish line. But he'll have to pay a price to get there."

JAMES TONEY (*onetime middleweight titlist and current heavyweight contender*): "It's manslaughter. Hopkins has great skills, while Oscar is an average, everyday guy who is a product of the media. Hopkins is an old-school fighter, who's not as great as I am, but he's doing a great job. I see it lasting about six or seven rounds, and I see a knockout. I see Hopkins knocking out De La Hoya like Tommy Hearns knocked out Roberto Duran, just not as early in the fight."

DAN RAFAEL (***USA Today*** *boxing writer*): "I thought that Oscar's chances to win were slim before the Sturm fight, but having looked at the doubleheader, I have to believe that his chances are none. That's what makes this fight intriguing. He's



Jim Lampley, HBO's blow-by-blow announcer, has always admired De La Hoya's skills and has often picked him to win big fights, but thinks "The Golden Boy" is in too deep with the strong and versatile Hopkins.

always been the favorite, but now, not only isn't he the favorite, he's a huge underdog this time. I can see a stoppage. Bernard is not going to carry De La Hoya, and he realizes that Oscar isn't a puncher at 160, or at 154. Bernard will try to make a point, like he did with Tito Trinidad. At some point, the rise in weight catches up to you. Bernard Hopkins has been at 160 throughout his career. I'm not sure what Oscar can do, but he is Oscar, so you have to watch."

BERNARDO OSUNA (***Solo Boxeo*** *broadcaster*): "I think Oscar is in for a long night against Bernard Hopkins, because Hopkins is too strong, he's too big, and even though the guy is close to 40 years old, he's in pristine shape. The only chance Oscar has is to box. He has to fight the same fight he had against Trinidad, except finish. Oscar won't present anything in the ring Hopkins hasn't seen before. He won't be overwhelmed by Oscar's speed. It will go to a decision, just because Oscar has so much heart. We all judge Oscar too harshly. We've seen his talent over the years and we've been spoiled. The fight against Sturm was a wakeup call. We're used to seeing Oscar dominating his opponents. People in his camp are genuinely concerned."

OZELL NELSON (*trainer of middleweight contender Jermain Taylor*): "I believe that Bernard Hopkins will win based on his size and physical strength. Bernard is just too big and too strong. Oscar should stick with a smaller weight class, because he's too good for the sport and he should keep boxing. He's a superstar, and we don't have many superstars in boxing. I would hate to see anything happen to Oscar, but when Oscar fought Sturm, it showed he was just too small to be a middleweight."

CARLOS ARIAS (***Orange County [California] Register*** *boxing writer*): "I had a lot more curiosity about this fight before the June 5 debacle. That night, it looked like De La Hoya had no chance against Hopkins. On the other hand, Oscar has been known to get up for the big fights, regardless of what you can say about his performance against Sturm. He'll give a valiant effort, but in the end, he doesn't have anything to hurt Bernard. Hopkins is just too strong. I say Hopkins by unanimous decision."

KASSIM OUMA (*junior middleweight contender*): "Bernard will win. I saw Oscar's last fight, and he didn't look good enough to beat Bernard. I like Bernard and Oscar's styles, but I can only see things from their last performance. I can't see Oscar passing Bernard. The fight will go to a decision, because Oscar is not a give-up guy."

FELIX STURM (*middleweight contender*): "De La Hoya will win the fight because he'll get used to being a middleweight. He learned from his fight with me, but the punches De La Hoya threw didn't hurt me in any way. He has to learn to throw more of his body behind his punches. I don't think I lost to De La Hoya, but he will learn from his experience with me and be better prepared for Hopkins."

AL BERNSTEIN (***Showtime Championship Boxing*** *ringside analyst*): "Based on his struggle at 160 pounds, Oscar can have further problems against Bernard Hopkins. The caveat is whether or not Bernard Hopkins can get old all of a sudden that night; that's the thing that can throw all this analysis into disarray. It's hard to pick against Hopkins in this fight.

Sturm, pictured with HBO's Larry Merchant after his debatable loss to De La Hoya, represents the voice of the minority. The German middleweight believes De La Hoya will make adjustments to fighting at middleweight and upset world champion Hopkins.

PHOTO BY CARLOS ALVAREZ/GETTY IMAGES

Most experts feel Hopkins is simply too strong and too physical for De La Hoya. Hopkins dominated Robert Allen from the inside and the outside, and it's on the inside, especially, that De La Hoya rates to be overmatched against the naturally bigger man.

You need a compelling reason, and I can't find one. You can see Hopkins using his jab on the outside in controlling De La Hoya, and he's certainly stronger than De La Hoya inside. Hopkins has several ways to win it, and I can't find a way for De La Hoya. It will either be a stoppage in the last third of the fight, or a unanimous decision for Hopkins."

JEFF LACY (*super middleweight contender*): "Bernard Hopkins is a roughhouse fighter, and Oscar De La Hoya is going to have to fight to win this. It's a bad decision to fight Bernard Hopkins. Since Oscar didn't look good at 160 pounds, it's a big mistake for Oscar. One of the things I keep thinking is that the fight is a cash-out fight for De La Hoya, but I can't see him doing that because he has all of the money in the world. I see Bernard Hopkins stopping De La Hoya in the late rounds."

TIM SMITH (*New York **Daily News** boxing writer*): "I've been struggling with this. As bad as De La Hoya looked against Sturm, that might have been because he didn't want to give up too much against Hopkins. Hopkins has turned out to be the closest thing to Marvin Hagler that we'll see in this era. He's a consummate middleweight, and when he sets his mind to it, he's as good as anyone in the game. I don't see it as a slaughter, because I see Oscar trying to box. But Oscar will fall into the traps that Bernard sets for him, and Hopkins will win."

WINKY WRIGHT (*world junior middleweight champion*): "Oscar just didn't look good at 160 pounds. Hopkins is going to beat De La Hoya, and it won't even be close. It'll be a definite stoppage. Oscar looked real bad against Sturm his last time out. You can see the way De La Hoya's body was; he just can't carry that weight. He can't do anything at 160, he needs to come back down to 154."

BRIAN KENNY (*host of ESPN2's **Friday Night Fights***): "It's possible to envision Oscar winning, if he boxes Hopkins the way he boxed Trinidad for the first 10 rounds. But the question is, does that Oscar De La Hoya still exist? Watching Hopkins and Allen, and I thought Hopkins was fine, but I thought Oscar up on his toes, fully engaged, he could beat this guy. When I saw the condition Oscar was in and the way he fought against Sturm, it made me change my mind. If De La Hoya fights trainer Floyd Mayweather's style and gets into Hopkins' grill, he'll be a tasty snack for Bernard. I say Hopkins bangs out a decision and roughs Oscar up for the first time in his career."

KEVIN IOLE (*Las Vegas **Review-Journal** boxing writer*): "I like Hopkins to win the fight by late stoppage. De La Hoya

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is just not a legitimate middleweight. De La Hoya won't be able to cope with Hopkins' physical superiority. Oscar's not going to hurt a legitimate middleweight, and I just don't see how Oscar De La Hoya will hurt Hopkins and keep Hopkins off him."

TRAVIS SIMMS (*junior middleweight contender*): "Bernard Hopkins will win the fight. He's a superior fighter and he's a lot stronger. That came out in De La Hoya's fight against Sturm. I don't think De La Hoya proved himself as a legitimate middleweight. Sturm was hitting De La Hoya with a very strong jab. Just imagine what Hopkins can do against De La Hoya. After this fight, De La Hoya is going to look like William Joppy did when he fought Hopkins. I see Bernard stopping De La Hoya somewhere around the ninth or 10th round."

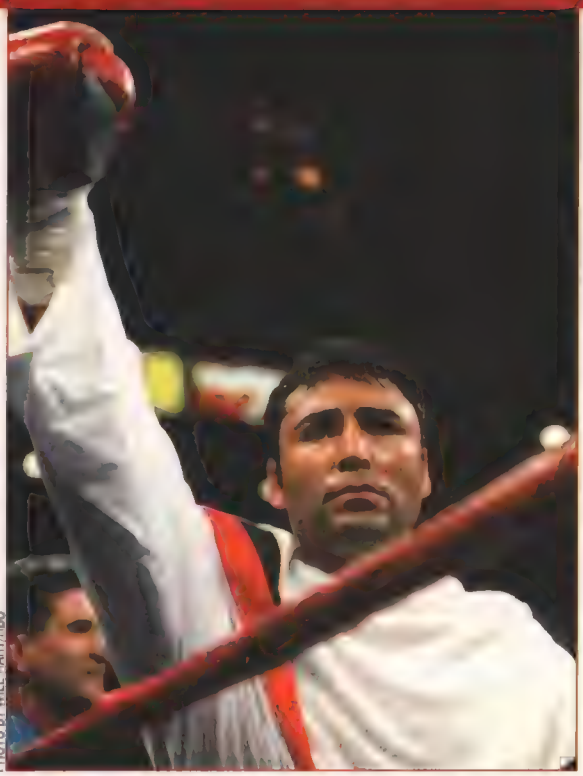


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

In the end, De La Hoya will need an extraordinary effort to raise his hand against Hopkins, most experts agreed. For the first time in his pro career, De La Hoya will enter the ring as an underdog.

TONY PAIGE (*radio host for New York's* ***WFAN*** *660 AM*): "Bernard Hopkins wins a relatively easy fight. It doesn't matter whether it's 10 or two rounds. De La Hoya left his punch at 147 pounds. If Oscar keeps complimenting Bernard, Bernard will do him a favor and take him out quick. Oscar doesn't have the firepower and his boxing skills will take him only so far. De La Hoya is in for a world of hurt. Taking this fight is the ultimate crapshoot for Oscar. I give him a lot of credit for getting in there with Hopkins. But I see a mid-round stoppage."

CALVIN WATKINS (***Dallas Morning News*** *boxing writer*): "Hopkins will win this fight, but everyone thinks it's going to be easy. Oscar will look a lot better than he did against Felix Sturm. Oscar has bitten off a little more than he can chew this time, and to his credit, he's fighting one of the baddest men in the world. Oscar can't knock out Hopkins; he's going to have jab Hopkins and force Hopkins to chase all night. But there's a chance he's taking there, because he's not as fast as he used to be. Oscar has a very good chin, but I see Hopkins winning a very comfortable decision."

JOE TESSITORE (*ESPN2's* ***Friday Night Fights*** *blow-by-blow announcer*): "Bernard Hopkins will win. I think you'll see a big difference in class in rounds eight through 12, when Bernard is still going to be bringing it—unless Bernard gets real old, real quick. This will look a lot like Bernard's fight against Tito, but I think Oscar will survive 12 rounds."

RONNIE SHIELDS (*trainer of recently retired middleweight contender Raul Marquez*): "De La Hoya has to get his weight down, for one. He has to come in at 153 or 154 pounds. Oscar needs to come in light, so he can be a little bit faster. Against Sturm, he looked fat. Bernard will win the fight, but Oscar will give him a good fight. I think De La Hoya will be in the fight the first six or seven rounds. The problem will be when he's not going to move anymore. Bernard will be too strong at the end for Oscar."

VERNO PHILLIPS (*IBF junior middleweight titlist*): "I think Bernard will come out on top because he's stronger at 160. Felix Sturm gave Oscar a tough fight at 160, and Bernard is a lot tougher than Felix Sturm. Oscar can pitty-pat and run, but Bernard will come to him and wear him down. When Oscar was fighting Sturm, he didn't even wear the guy down and his punches aren't that strong at 160. Oscar should come down to 154 and fight me."

TOTALS: Hopkins 19, De La Hoya 1 ■

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

If the experts are right, Hopkins will be the one sharing a smile with Merchant after his fight with De La Hoya. But the manner in which Hopkins will win stirred some debate. Some like Hopkins by knockout, while others feel The Golden Boy, who has never been stopped, can go the full 12.

De La Hoya-Hopkins STAFF PICKS

Nigel Collins: Hopkins W 12

"Both of these men are headed for the Hall of Fame five years after their final fight, so a win for either wouldn't be that earthshaking from a historical perspective. But this is the here-and-now, and other than age and *maybe* hand speed, Hopkins seems to have an edge in virtually every department. Look for Hopkins to beat De La Hoya to the punch from the get-go, brush aside a spirited counterattack, and pound out a decision so convincing not even Las Vegas judges can screw it up."

Eric Raskin: Hopkins KO 12

"You can throw out the Sturm fight; De La Hoya will be in far better shape for Hopkins. But I remember thinking during the second De La Hoya-Mosley fight, for which Oscar was very well prepared, that he wouldn't have finished on his feet had he been in with Hopkins that night. So even if De La Hoya comes in at about 154 pounds, as ready as he's ever been, that won't be enough. Hopkins, when he's focused and in the zone, is the most complete fighter in the world today, and I expect him to break De La Hoya down, win nearly every round, and force a merciful stoppage with the clock winding down."

Joe Santoliquito: Hopkins KO 8

"Hopkins must have a fountain of youth hidden somewhere, because he seems to be getting better with age. De La Hoya, on the other hand, may be thinking about cashing out on his great career with one huge pay day in a valiant effort against what appears to be an unbeatable machine disguised as a middleweight. De La Hoya may be in better shape for Hopkins than he was for Sturm, but that's not going to matter. Hopkins will methodically take apart De La Hoya much the same way he took apart Felix Trinidad. He'll stay in that defensive shell and counter everything De La Hoya throws. Once he gets De La Hoya in trouble, Hopkins will step on his throat and finish it."

Stu Saks: Hopkins W 12

"It might be difficult to fathom after seeing him in the ring against Felix Sturm, but Oscar has spread himself too thin. While Oscar still loves the game, he also loves golf tournaments and singing and acting and endorsing. Hopkins' commitment to boxing remains what it was when his career began, and that could be the reason he's never had to move up in weight. Oscar left his greatness a couple of divisions and CDs back. Hopkins dominates all but the rounds he chooses to take a breather."

William Dettloff: De La Hoya W 12

"Snigger all you want, De La Hoya will win this fight by moving, boxing, and keeping his jab at the end of Hopkins' nose. It's been a long time since Hopkins has had to walk down a good mover, and despite the slow-footed performance De La Hoya gave against Felix Sturm, he still has good wheels and good speed. He'll use them to take the first five rounds, a couple more after, and then survive Hopkins' late rush. Remember, you don't have to win all the rounds, just the majority of them. De La Hoya knows that, and he has the tools to do it."

Jeff Ryan: Hopkins KO 9

"It's difficult to envision a scenario in which De La Hoya is victorious. His power has been less effective with each climb in weight, and he'll now be hitting an even bigger man whose chin is one of the game's best. Nor can 'The Golden Boy' outbox Hopkins who, even at 39, appears to be at his peak as a strategist and technician. Nonetheless, De La Hoya's heart and aggression will make it a grueling battle, one so draining that neither fighter will ever bring his A-game into the ring again."

Ivan Goldman: Hopkins W 12

"I thought Oscar had a chance until I saw how porous his defense had become against Felix Sturm. He will try to stick and move against Hopkins, but against Bernard's superior footwork, so what? Oscar's best bets are either Kryptonite or to bring back the same judges who scored the Sturm fight." ■

HOPKINS VS. DE LA HOYA

Preview & Analysis

By Nigel Collins

ILLUSTRATIONS BY BARRY RICKWOOD

You knew something was amiss when Oscar De La Hoya weighed in for his fight with Felix Sturm wearing a T-shirt. It was undoubtedly a crushing disappointment for the pack of adoring females who attend these events to swoon at the sight of their hero stripped to his skivvies. But when De La Hoya took off his robe the next night after entering the ring at the MGM Grand, the reason for his new-found modesty was obvious: The only matinee idol he resembled was the fat Elvis of the late-1970s. Okay, so maybe Oscar didn't train on fried peanut-butter-and-banana sandwiches, but his once-buff body sure looked like he had.

But the Sturm fight is history, and De La Hoya understands that fighting Bernard Hopkins in anything less than peak physical condition would be akin to diving into a shark tank with a bloody nose. Let's assume, therefore, that De La Hoya learnt his lesson against Sturm and whips himself into the best possible shape for what figures to be the most challenging fight of his career. Otherwise, analyzing the match could be boiled down to three words: Hopkins wins mismatch.

You don't have to be Eddie Futch to realize that if De La Hoya is going to have a chance of winning, he'll have to

De La Hoya's best punch has always been a power-laden left hook, but whether or not it will do serious damage to the steel-chinned Hopkins, a career-long 160-pounder, is just one of many intriguing questions going into their September showdown.

Hopkins' right hand was the single most damaging punch in "The Executioner's" knockout of Felix Trinidad, and is sure to play a role against De La Hoya. Some experts think Hopkins will become to first to stop "The Golden Boy."

do it as much with his legs as with his fists. And in order to maximize his foot speed, it makes sense for him to weigh between 153 and 155 pounds. We've seen how he looks and fights at 160, and it wasn't a pretty sight. Bulk, in and of itself, will be counterproductive. De La Hoya isn't going to be able to out-muscle Hopkins regardless of what he weighs. Light and lean is clearly the way to go.

Hopkins' conditioning is never in question. He's like a well-worn piece of leather, tough but flexible, honed to perfection by a career-long work ethic that resembles that of the last great middleweight champion before him, Marvelous Marvin Hagler. The fact that he stays in shape, rather than getting in shape on a fight-by-fight basis, is one of the reasons Hopkins is still at the top at an age when most fighters are finished or fading fast.

Yet, the fact that Hopkins will be closer to his 40th birthday than his 39th come fight time is seen as the one intangible that could possibly tip the scales in De La Hoya's favor. True, Hopkins has shown no signs of slowing down, but he hasn't had a taxing fight since stopping Felix Trinidad in September 2001. In four starts since then, he's cruised to victories over fair-to-middling opposition. But beating De La Hoya will require another effort similar to the one that sank Trinidad. What happens if Hopkins tries to raise his game back up to that level, only to discover his A-game has slipped to B-minus?

The guess here is that Hopkins knows he only has a couple of great fights left in him and has been preserving himself for when it really counts. He figures he can fire up the afterburners and turn De La Hoya into toast pretty much the way he did Trinidad. But all fighters, even those who look after their bodies as carefully as Hopkins, get old eventually. And it

would obviously benefit De La Hoya if that day arrives on September 18.

Besides age and conditioning, there are many other factors that will play a role in determining the outcome. In his only defeat in more than a decade, Hopkins lost a 12-round decision to Roy Jones, basically because Jones enjoyed an edge in hand and foot speed. De La Hoya used a comparable fight plan to thwart Trinidad's attack in their September '99 skirmish, and even though he lost a controversial decision after running the final three rounds, Oscar employed the sort of fight plan and the discipline to see it through that might upset Hopkins. While stick and move isn't a very macho method, it's the only strategy that makes sense for the man who began his pro career as 130-pounder and is now going up against a natural middleweight.

It's no secret that De La Hoya will have to use his legs and foot speed to foil Hopkins' methodical attack. The more Oscar keeps the action at long range, the better chance he'll have of springing an upset.

Even so, an intelligent fight plan might not be enough against Hopkins. It's easy to overlook the middleweight champion's versatile brand of boxing. Despite the hood and throat-slashing hand gestures that have become his trademarks, Hopkins' "Executioner" nickname derives as much from his ability to "execute" a myriad moves as it does his knack for ending fights inside the distance. Although it doesn't fit the Philadelphian's badass image, he has just as much right to call himself "The Professor" as Azumah Nelson did. To a large degree, it's the subtle things Hopkins does—the stuff the boo birds in the balcony usually seem to miss—that makes him such a savvy fighter. You can almost hear him thinking in the ring.

One of the benefits of the countless hours Hopkins has spent in the hard-scrabble gyms of his hometown is the ability to fight on the inside. Most Philly gyms feature an undersized ring, which forces fighters

to learn the nuances of the inside game or quickly fall by the wayside. In the trenches, it's all about angles, and none has mastered the art of giving angles better than Hopkins. He knows exactly how to position his body so that opponents are denied a clean shot, while situating himself in a way that allows him to not only score, but to score with power.

It's also on the inside that the crafty Hopkins often bends the rules. One of his favorite gambits is to bang his foe below the belt while the ref is out of position to see the foul. A master at psychological warfare, he does this as much to intimidate and frustrate his rivals as to hurt them.

De La Hoya, however, is far from a dumb fighter, so you've got to figure he'll do his best to avoid engaging Hopkins up close. Presumably, he'll enter the contest with strict instructions to move, move, and then move some more. But De La Hoya isn't afraid to mix it up. Though it is frequently overlooked, his inclination to go for the gusto is one of his best qualities. The Trinidad fight was an anomaly, a case of poor judgment on both his and his corner's part. It was, after all, De La Hoya's willingness to dig in and let his hands go that made the Sturm fight close enough for Oscar to get the benefit of the doubt from the judges. And it wasn't the first time he's rallied to overcome adversity. Remember his last-round onslaught against Ike Quartey and the way he fought off Fernando Vargas' determined bid? Yes, love him or hate him, honest observers will have to admit that "The Golden Boy's" heart is as big as his ego.

Hopkins is one of the best infighters around and knows how to position his body so that he can land and his opponents cannot. It would be foolish for De La Hoya to play into the champ's hands by staying inside.

While a penchant for cutting loose when things get sticky is a positive quality that has salvaged many a fight for many a fighter, it is also one that can lead to disaster. Pound-for-pound, De La Hoya's left hook is probably a slightly harder punch than Hopkins' right hand,

but at middleweight, the power advantage goes to Hopkins.

On the other hand, De La Hoya has shown an excellent chin throughout his career, and nobody has come close to stopping him. In fact, he seems to have carried his durability along with him as he's progressed upward in weight better than he has his punch, which was devastating at lightweight and junior welter, but has been less so at junior middle and middleweight.

Defensively, De La Hoya has worked hard to learn trainer Floyd Mayweather Sr.'s shoulder-roll technique. It's an outstanding method for avoiding blows and remaining in position to counter, but Oscar has never seemed totally comfortable with it, and it might backfire against a fighter as polished as Hopkins.

De La Hoya will find Hopkins one of the roughest fighters he's ever encountered. In virtually every fight, the Philly tough guy manages to plant a few shots below the belt when the referee is out of position. He's also been known to lead with his head and to tie opponents up with one arm while punishing them with the other.

Hopkins and De La Hoya's mental approach is also going to be crucial. Few of today's fighters get inside of their opponents' heads as effectively as Hopkins, but things could be different this time. Hopkins admitted that he allowed the occasion to get to him slightly when he fought Allen on the De La Hoya-Sturm show. His main concern wasn't beating Allen; he'd done that before. But this time there was more pressure. He knew full well that if something went awry, it could cost him everything he's worked for since turning pro in 1988, and consequently, Hopkins fought a more conservative fight than circumstances and his opponent warranted.

As the underdog for one of the few times in his career, De La Hoya is in the unusual position of having little to lose. If Hopkins whips him, and Oscar wants to keep fighting, he can drop back down to junior middle and probably still make more money for his next fight than Hopkins will for his first post-De La

Hoya defense. This is not to say that De La Hoya doesn't want to win or won't give everything he has to accomplish his mission. It's just that a relaxed De La Hoya will be more likely to spring an upset than one who's uptight.

From an emotional point of view, Hopkins' backers have to hope that he's not so happy to be getting his first eight-figure payday that he loses his edge. It's imperative for Hopkins to find something, anything, to get angry about. Anger has always been his greatest ally, and it would be extremely bad timing for him to suddenly turn into Mr. Mellow.

Many have drawn comparisons between the Hopkins-De La Hoya fight and Ray Leonard vs. Hagler in 1987. The reasons are obvious: Like Leonard, De La Hoya is a smaller, prettier, and more popular fighter who is moving up in weight to challenge a no-nonsense, aging, and long-reigning middleweight champion. And while there are interesting parallels, there are also significant differences.

De La Hoya has been working on learning the shoulder roll ever since Floyd Mayweather Sr. started training him. Providing he finally gets the hang of it prior to facing Hopkins, the technique could really help him, especially in the trenches.

Hagler's two previous bouts leading up to Leonard were against Thomas "The Hit Man" Hearns and John "The Beast" Mugabi, two of the most demanding fights of Hagler's career, fights in which he took considerable punishment before prevailing. Hopkins, conversely, absorbed fewer blows in his four post-Trinidad bouts than Hagler soaked up in the first round of the Hearns fight alone. Yes, Hopkins will be chronologically older when he fights De La Hoya (39) than Hagler was when he tangled with Leonard (a month shy of 33), but Hopkins is by far the fresher fighter.

It's not impossible to imagine De La Hoya coming out on top; he's already done it 37 times in 40 pro bouts against the best in five divisions. But providing top gear is still there when he reaches for it, Hopkins is still going to be middleweight champion when he wakes up the morning of September 19. An inside-the-distance win is well within the bounds of reason, but the guess here is that De La Hoya will gut it out and last the distance, only to lose a fairly wide decision. ■

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

WHERE ARE YOU WATCHING THE BIG FIGHT?

There May Be A Drunk In Your Face Or Salsa On Your Couch ... But You Really Can't Go Wrong!

By Jeff Ryan

Ah, yes, the good old days. We've become conditioned to thinking that everything—from the quality of world title fights to the art of defense to the taste of the pushcart tacos in the Olympic Auditorium parking lot—was better way back when. That's because, in almost every case, it's true. There *is* one area in which the past can't measure up to the present, however, one example of the "good old days" catching an uppercut on the chin, staggering across the ring, and falling at the feet of the here and now. That's when it comes to watching a fight.

Sitting down to a boxing match today—whether squeezing into an arena seat, sinking into a living room couch cushion, or balancing on a barstool—is a far more pleasurable experience than it was not just in the 1940s, but even in the '80s. The fighters may still wear gloves and trunks, swing at each other for three-minute intervals, and chase after gaudy title belts, but this is not your father's Sweet Science.

It's ironic that when boxing was enjoying its golden age, in the '50s, the fans weren't enjoying much of anything. Even the grandest of venues were dumps by today's standards. If the ticketholder had a roof over his head, he was probably inhaling enough second-hand smoke to lower his life expectancy by a decade. The big ballpark fights had plenty of atmosphere—but if you were one of the poor fools in the upper deck at Yankee Stadium, you couldn't tell if that was Rocky Marciano or Phil Rizzuto avoiding the take-out around second base.

As for televised boxing, well, it was about as polished as a belt buckle in a homeless shelter. We're talking about a black-and-white picture, two camera angles at the most, muffled sound, ads splashed over the action, primitive graphics, and just one broadcaster. (If that was Don Dunphy, great. If it wasn't, well, better luck next Friday night.)

Compare that to the fight game nowadays. In 2004, the arenas are smoke-free and clean, with comfy seats, good sightlines, and luxury suites that are nicer than most people's apartments. Missed that flash knockdown? Just catch the replay on the JumboTron. Even casino-hotel ballrooms, though sterile, add an air of class to the proceedings that the Ridgewood Grove couldn't on its best day.

And when we talk about the strides made in TV coverage of the sport, geez, it's like we're comparing a state-of-the-art, computerized gas range and a caveman rubbing two sticks together. Imagine if the two Muhammad Ali-Sonny Liston showdowns aired on HBO PPV instead of closed-circuit. All of the mystery of what was wrong with Ali's eyes or what Liston said when he quit on his stool might have been solved by HBO's microphones in the corners. And the numerous camera angles, especially the one from overhead, would have given us a definitive answer on whether or not that mysterious "anchor punch" landed in Lewiston, Maine.

On September 18, one of the best matchups of superstars in years, Bernard Hopkins vs. Oscar De La Hoya, will unfold at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. Whether you're watching the clash in person that night or on pay-per-view from half-a-continent away, you'll be experiencing boxing history in a way a whole lot of people who cheered for Sugar Ray Robinson, Joe Louis, and Henry Armstrong only wish they could have.

With that in mind, let's take a look at the four different ways one can watch Hopkins-De La Hoya or any other big showdown these days, explore the pros and cons of each, and perhaps get a better idea of how to make the viewing experience more pleasurable.

BOYS NIGHT IN

Having a bunch of your buddies over to the house on fight night can create a great atmosphere and, no, that doesn't mean you have to turn your abode into the set of *Animal House II*. Let's face it: Boxing fans deserve the equivalent of a Super Bowl party at least once a year.

Advantages: The right mix of guests can provide better—or at least more entertaining—analysis than an All-Star team of

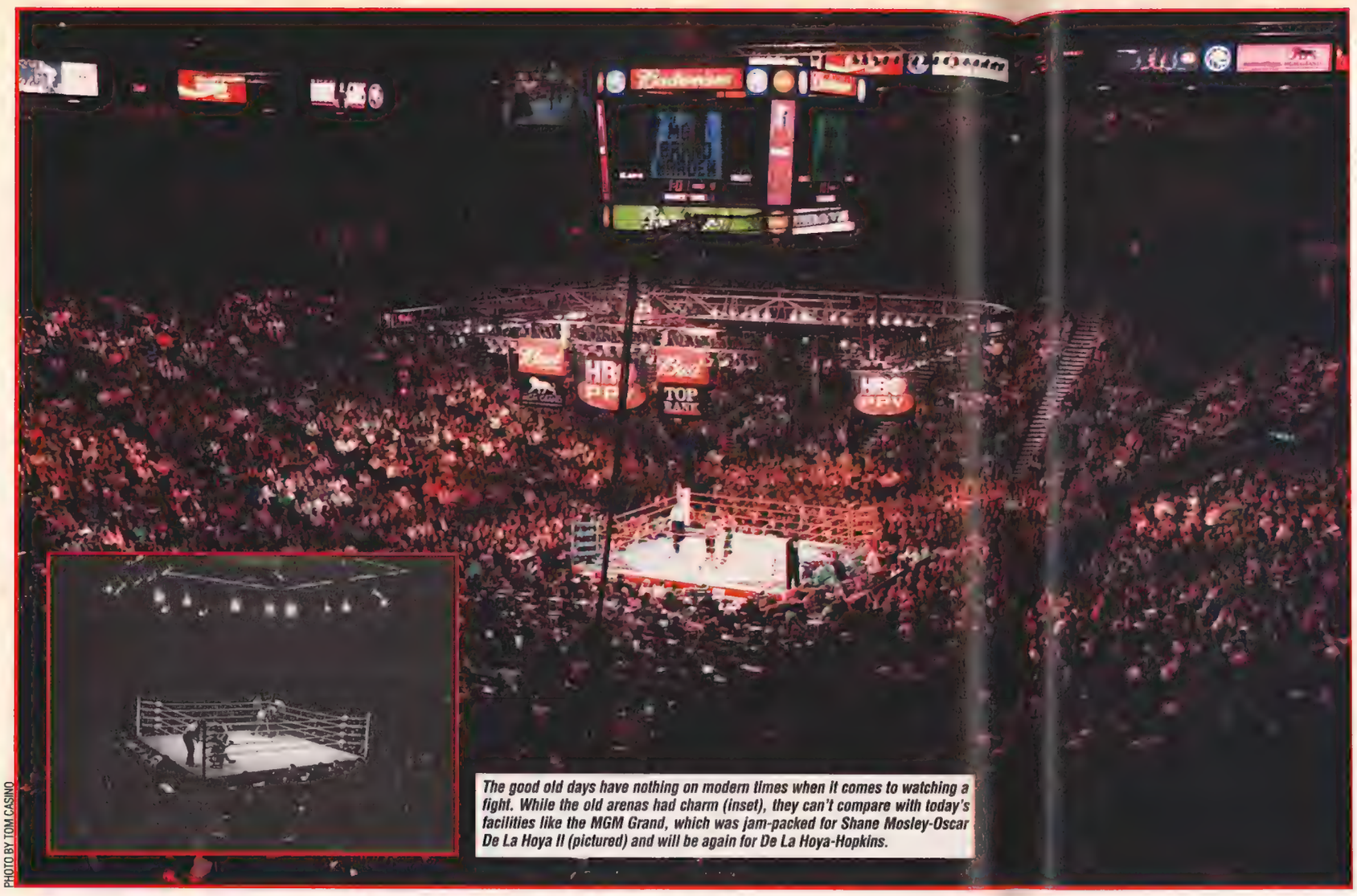


PHOTO BY TOM CASINO

The good old days have nothing on modern times when it comes to watching a fight. While the old arenas had charm (inset), they can't compare with today's facilities like the MGM Grand, which was jam-packed for Shane Mosley-Oscar De La Hoya II (pictured) and will be again for De La Hoya-Hopkins.

television talking heads. With boxing fans dying off every day and a growing sense that the sport primarily has a cult following, it's good for morale to hang out with fellow diehards. Creating your very own Section 17 is the next best thing to being at the MGM Grand.

Disadvantages: People talking when you're trying to listen to the commentary, having to tolerate someone's stupid opinion, a mess to clean up afterward.

Don't make the mistake of: Letting your wife or girlfriend stay at home. Send her out with the girls. The last thing you need is for your lady to be walking through the living room when one of the boys is relaying the story of how the bachelor party hooker took her … uh, you get the point.

Don't you wish: Today's camera work, graphics, and sound could be combined with Howard Cosell's incomparable coverage?

It doesn't get better than: Two of my friends having to be pulled apart in my basement after their debate over who won the Ali-Jimmy Young bout moments earlier turned violent. Their scrap featured far better action than anything in the main event, probably because there were no ropes for anyone to keep ducking out of, the way Young had.

Good riddance: Closed-circuit telecasts in theaters, arenas, catering halls, and drive-ins. Rare was the occasion when the picture was clear *and* you could hear what the broadcasters were saying. My worst experience: Sugar Ray Leonard-Roberto Duran I in a high school gym in Elizabeth, New Jersey. For 20 bucks (which was a lot for a college kid in 1980), we got a *black-and-white* picture and sound that kept cutting off. The Hispanic guys in the crowd that night were saying, "No mas," a full five months before Duran made it famous.

Answer me this: Why is it that the one guy who brings nothing at all to the party, not even a bottle opener on the end of a Swiss Army knife, is the slob who ends up eating and drinking the most?

Tips for enhancing the experience: 1) If you live in an apartment building and plan on having a noisy crowd, invite the neighbors over. They most likely won't come, but your invitation might keep them from getting mad when you and the boys start making the walls quake. 2) Appoint a designated driver. 3) If you're supplying all of the liquids and munchies, have no qualms about asking everyone to kick in a few bucks for the PPV. If everyone is bringing the snacks, then pay for the telecast yourself. 4) Invent some cool drinking games. Like everyone does a shot when Harold Lederman's voice reaches an octave only Mariah Carey has been known to hit, Jim Lampley uses a big word, Roy Jones trips over his tongue, or Larry Merchant laughs at his own joke.

"ROW L, SEAT 4, THAT'S RIGHT THIS WAY, SIR"

Nothing in sports, not The Masters, the finals of Wimbledon, the seventh game of the World Series, or the Super Bowl creates the electricity within the stadium or arena that a true superfight does. Being right there in such a setting is an experience that's better lived than described. The months of hype are over and two superstars whose careers we've followed for years finally touch gloves and come out fighting. No teammates. No tomorrow. No comparison.

Advantages: Spectators in the arena often have a better indication of how hard a punch lands, how badly a fighter is hurt, and how tired the combatants are. And live fights are a great release of pent-up fan energy. Rooting becomes a lot more passionate when you know that your cheers are actually being heard.

Disadvantages: Let's see, there's the potential for an obnoxious stranger to ruin your night with his boorish behavior, no expert analysis to listen to, only one vantage point (sometimes obstructed), dealing with the elements if you're outdoors, and public bathrooms. And with no film clips, interviews, or commentary to keep you entertained, the wait between fights can seem endless.

Don't make the mistake of: Automatically buying the cheapest seats. Tickets in the middle price range for most fights don't sell out as quickly as ringside or the peanut gallery, so you have more of a chance to obtain them.

Don't you wish: Madison Square Garden, still the most famous fight venue in the world, staged more battles?

It doesn't get better than: Sitting ringside for Julio Cesar Chavez-Meldrick Taylor I and seeing all at the same time, a) the red light on the ringpost that was blinking down the final seconds, b) ref Richard Steele asking a dazed Taylor if he was okay, c) Chavez failing to remain in a neutral corner, and d) Taylor trainer Lou Duva climbing on the ring apron. Fans watching at home didn't enjoy the same perspective.

Good riddance: Tobacco smoke and those flash cameras that left everyone seeing more spots than a guy who'd been clubbed by Earnie Shavers.

Answer me this: Why, no matter if it's a four-rounder or "The Thrilla In Manila," will the crowd always turn its attention away from the ring and toward the two drunks who are firing punches at each other in the cheap seats?

Tips for enhancing the experience: Bring your own food, as prices in just about every venue in the country are an obscenity. And with the money you save, buy every souvenir you can get your mitts on. That means T-shirts, programs, cups, etc. Even save your ticket stub. Boxing items are relatively rare in the world of sports collectibles, and even the simplest mementos from major events command top dollar at memorabilia shows.

ANOTHER ROUND IN THE BOOKS

The sports bar isn't just another outlet for watching boxing. It's a place where you can size up the crowd and immediately determine who knows the game and who, despite his attempts to dazzle with b.s., couldn't tell Lennox Lewis from Lenox china.

Advantages: Free PPV (or at least cheaper PPV, if the bar charges a cover), easily available drinks, a cross-section of boxing enthusiasts, and people anxious to debate anything from Eusebio Pedroza's Hall of Fame worthiness to Lucia Rijker's sexiness.

Disadvantages: These places tend to turn into rush-hour subway cars by the time the main event unfolds, there are drunks aplenty, you can't take notes of any kind lest you be pestered by people wondering what you're doing, it's hard to hear the commentary, and you're sometimes forced to stand too far away from a tiny screen.

Don't make the mistake of: Debating a guy who just finished his sixth Jack Daniel's and ginger ale.

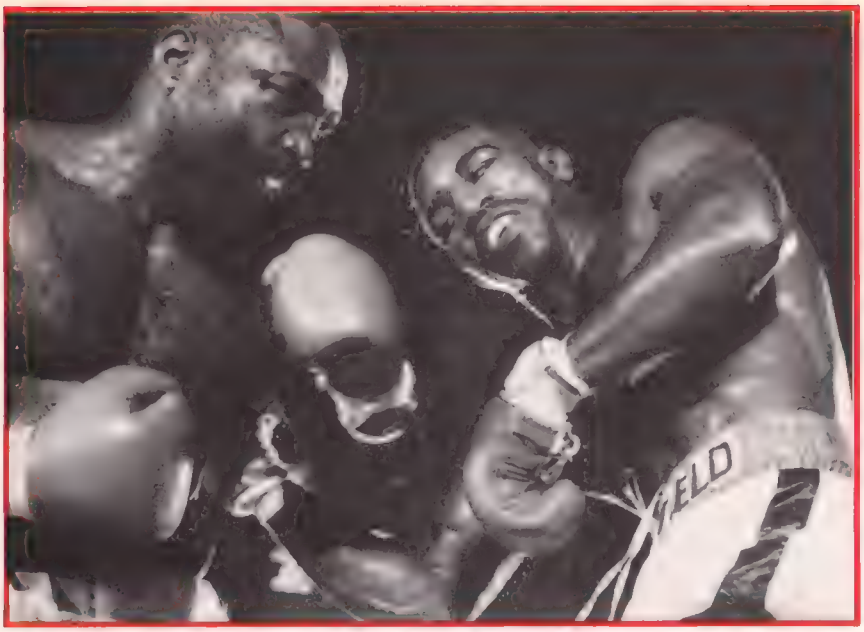
Don't you wish: Every bar served Pabst Blue Ribbon, Rheingold, Schaefer, Knickerbocker, and Schmidt's? Now, *those* were traditional boxing beers. And they never painted slippery logos on the canvas, either.

It doesn't get better than: Watching Evander Holyfield-Dwight Qawi I in a bar in New Jersey and seeing fight fans being born before my eyes.

Good riddance: Bars thick with smoke (in most major cities, at least). The smoking bans that have been catching on in recent years mean you won't go home with your clothes and hair reeking of cigarettes.

Answer me this: Why do drunks in sports bars talk an inch away from your face, as though the two of you are Leonard and Wilfred Benitez engaged in their famous prefight staredown?

Tips for enhancing the experience: 1) Arrive early, secure a bar seat that's closest to the TV, give the bartender a big tip, and tell him to space out your drinks or serve you



Jeff Ryan was at a sports bar for the riveting first Evander Holyfield-Dwight Qawi fight in '86, and he remembers seeing people become fight fans on the spot. The neighborhood pub can be a ton of fun, but beware of the close-talking drunk who lurks in every bar.

soda so that you can keep your spot for the entire night. 2) Impress just about any woman in the place by explaining to her why boxing isn't the barbaric kill-fest she thinks it is, but is instead an art form. If you get lucky, she'll let you play Henry Akinwande to her Lennox Lewis before the night is out.

FLYING SOLO

Perhaps the guys are into NASCAR or the NBA instead of boxing. Or maybe you had your fill of male bonding two nights earlier, when you and your friends made fools out of yourselves with your rendition of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" on Karaoke Night at Denny's. Whatever. The man who finds himself all alone with Hopkins-De La Hoya on the TV and his feet on the coffee table isn't a social outcast. He's a guy who knows how to treat himself to the finer things in life.

Advantages: Peace and quiet. The freedom to watch the telecast in your underwear, eat whatever you want without your best friend calling you the Michelin Man, and concentrate on the war in the trenches instead of on your friend spilling salsa on the couch.

Disadvantages: No one to compare notes with except the cat and no audience to entertain with cracks about Michael Buffer's hair or the round-card girls' outfits.

Don't make the mistake of: Forgetting to score the fight yourself, falling asleep during the main event because you didn't get to bed early enough the night before, or blowing off the undercard to watch *CSI: Miami*.

Don't you wish: Prime-time boxing on ABC, NBC, and CBS, something we grew accustomed to in the '70s and '80s, returned?

It doesn't get better than: Hearing the cheering and whooping that was emanating from the windows of the buildings on both sides of my street after Buster Douglas upended Mike Tyson in 1990.

Good riddance: "Analyst" George Foreman.

Answer me this: Why does my cheapo cable company (and, presumably, many others) charge $49.95 per TV and not per dwelling? It sucks that after yours truly gets tired and wants to watch the second half of the fight on the bedroom TV, he can't because it only comes on in the living room. To get the broadcast in the bedroom would require clicking the "order" button on the remote, bending over like Ned Beatty in *Deliverance*, and asking to be charged another $49.95.

Tips for enhancing the experience: Try to find a copy of the 1996 book *You Be The Boxing Judge*, by judge Tom Kaczmarek (Dorrance Publishing, $9.95). Read it, learn the fine points of scoring a fight, and turn yourself into a better judge when you watch Hopkins-De La Hoya or some other shootout. Also, be sure to tune in to the postfight coverage on ESPN, CNN, or anywhere else you can find it. Twenty years ago, the superfight ended when the telecast from ringside signed off. Nowadays, the proliferation of TV sports outlets gives viewers a better seat at the postfight press conference than the beat writers get.

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Hope that helps a bit with your preparations for Hopkins-De La Hoya. Nothing can beat being in Las Vegas that night, but take it from this ringsider/couch potato/barfly: Unless you have third-row tickets for a battle on a casino riverboat that begins taking on water faster than The Titanic, or a screwed up picture tube turns the action on your TV screen a funky shade of fuchsia, there is no bad way to watch a good fight. Only bad ways to not watch one. ■

Jeff Ryan is a former managing editor of this magazine and a regular contributor.

PHOTO BY JAY GOLDBERG

Just because you're watching the big PPV fight by yourself, that doesn't mean you're a loser. Being on your own allows you to keep score in peace, hear all the commentary, and be as much of a slob as you want to be. It can get lonely, however, having nobody to discuss the fight with.

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WHAT IT MEANS IF DE LA HOYA WINS

By William Dettloff

Some people are never satisfied. You'd think that winning at least an alphabet title in every weight class between 130 and 154 pounds—five in all—would be enough for Oscar De La Hoya. You'd think, too, that an Olympic gold medal, more money than he could ever hope to spend, and a resume that includes wins over most of the past decade's better fighters around his weight would be enough. It isn't.

It isn't just De La Hoya who is, apparently, unfulfilled as yet by what he's accomplished in the ring. There are critics still—whose numbers admittedly have shrunk over the past couple of years—who maintain that he ducked the best fighters in each of the divisions in which he won a title; that he chose smaller, weaker, or significantly worn opponents whenever possible; that he got a decision or two that should have gone the other way; and that on the rare occasion that things didn't go his way, he acted in a manner unbefitting a professional fighter of real substance.

That De La Hoya's detractors are on target with some of their assertions is beside the point, because you don't have to be undefeated, nor entirely reckless in choosing your opposition, to be great. If you did, the Hall of Fame, into which De La Hoya will deservedly be enshrined the moment he is eligible, would be nearly empty. But that matters little to De La Hoya; he knows a win over Bernard Hopkins would silence all but his most virulent critics. There can be no other reason to fight him, after all.

It's true that a De La Hoya victory would be followed by the usual exclama-

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

With his GQ looks, a win for Oscar is a win for the boxing business

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Guys like Mosley and Wright have a chance at money fights with De La Hoya

tions: Hopkins finally got old, or fought the wrong kind of fight, or, from the quarters most prejudiced, the fix was in. But De La Hoya will know better. If he wins it won't ever matter again that he "ran" from Felix Trinidad (indeed, absent a rematch, De La Hoya couldn't ask for a better way to avenge that dubious defeat), or that twice now the judges liked Shane Mosley a little better. If De La Hoya wins, his supporters will have been proved right, his critics wrong, and he will enter the pantheon, unopposed. A win over Hopkins presumably assures about as restful and satisfied a retirement as any prize fighter could hope for, assuming such a thing exists. It might even be enough to please his old man.

It would stand to reason that having a legend like De La Hoya at the head of the middleweight division would be good for all 160-pound fighters—high tide lifting all boats and all that. And there are fewer weight classes in the game more in need of lifting. But De La Hoya is bigger than the middleweight division, symbolically at least, and that isn't a great help to everybody. All manner of fighters between 154 and 168 pounds will scramble toward 160 to try to make a fight with him for the money he brings, but the great majority will be summarily turned away.

De La Hoya is not now, nor would he be after beating Hopkins, the kind of fighter who is terribly interested in cleaning out a division. He doesn't need to. His legacy was fortified, more or less, before the Hopkins fight. A victory over Hopkins would not lead to him facing down the Kassim Oumas, Verno Phillipses, or Howard Eastmans of the world. What would be the purpose? What would be his motivation? A few more million? No, the nameless dozens between junior and super middleweight will remain so even if De La Hoya is the king at 160.

That's the bad news. The good is that even after beating Hopkins, De La Hoya would likely remain interested in superfights, or at the least, fights against the guys who have beaten him—Mosley and Trinidad. That sets up interesting opportunities for those guys, and maybe Hopkins, too, to throw down for the right to get to De La Hoya in a rematch, or in Mosley's case, a third match (provided Mosley's new team can breathe new life and direction into him). That, of course, brings Winky Wright into the picture as well, and can't you see Hopkins, Wright, Mosley, and Trinidad in a kind of De La Hoya lottery? For the top guys at 160, a De La Hoya victory over Hopkins means very big business for a short while, until De La Hoya retires. For everybody else in the neighborhood, not so much.

To get a sense for what a victory by De La Hoya would mean for the business of boxing overall, one only has to recall that De La Hoya probably is the only active fighter who could cause a traffic disruption with an afternoon stroll in midtown Manhattan. Sure, you could spot Mark Johnson or Rosendo Alvarez from a block away, but to the rest of the world, they're just a short guy and an even shorter guy. De La Hoya is different. People who don't follow boxing and don't care for it know who he is and what he looks like. Young girls dig him, too, and while it's not as though that demographic will change the economics of the sport, nobody's holding a benefit for Justin Timberlake or Ashton Kutcher. A lot of young girls have money, somehow, and they like to spend it on looking at hot, hip guys. De La Hoya fits the mold still, even though he's more than 30 years old. If he loses to Hopkins, a potentially lucrative marketing base for the sport is lost.

If De La Hoya wins? Everybody wins—except for Hopkins. And it's not just that De La Hoya is good-looking and articulate and commercially palatable to the American consumer—particularly for a fighter. It's also because he's not supposed to win. It's because he's supposed to get beaten up, stopped even, and that's what most of us will expect to happen. Everybody loves an upset, especially when the underdog is the game's cash cow.

Sure, we know that Hopkins is the old-school guy, the guy who came up rough, the one who epitomizes real prize fighters. But the rest of the world doesn't know that. They wouldn't care if they did. They see a guy with a crooked nose who looks and sounds a lot like an extra from the set of Oz, and then they see De La Hoya, all smiles, with his straight white teeth and bashful good looks and they think, *This is the guy we want to see on* The Tonight Show, *this is the guy who could sell us something*. We don't have to like it necessarily, but that's the way it is. De La Hoya has the touch. He always has, and he'll have it until he's done. Will it solve all the game's ills if he wins? No. But it wouldn't hurt. ■

WHAT IT MEANS IF HOPKINS WINS

By William Dettloff

So this was the plan. Now we get it. We missed it completely. All along we'd thought Bernard Hopkins was going loony when he either passed on or negotiated himself out of big fight after big fight following his knockout win over Felix Trinidad. At the time, we expected Roy Jones to be next. (We'd have settled for Joe Calzaghe.) We got Carl Daniels. Then a year off. Then Morrade Hakkar. Another nine months off. Then William Joppy, which was a decent enough matchup, but well past its "best used by" date. We didn't get it then. We get it now.

Well, we get some of it. We still don't get the firing of Bouie Fisher (though we get the reunion). We still don't get accusing Lou DiBella of taking a bribe (or, for that matter, how everyone has so easily forgiven Hopkins for it). Those things we still don't get. But now we get the stalling and the filibustering and the feet-stomping Hopkins did. We get it all. It turns out he did know how to cash his winning lottery ticket, to paraphrase Don King. He just wanted to wait until his contract with King expired before doing it. Good for him.

Hopkins already is halfway home. The fight with De La Hoya is signed, he has his guarantee, and with King out of the picture, he gets to keep a far greater percentage of it than he would have had King been in the picture. Both Hopkins and De La Hoya survived their tuneups. The money's as good as in the bank. So Bernard Hopkins, the businessman, already has won. Things could not have worked out better for him. Every fighter should know how to play the system so adroitly.

PHOTO BY TEDDY BLACKBURN

A victory for Hopkins is a victory for the middleweight old-school

But there is still Hopkins the prize fighter to consider. Without him, Hopkins the businessman doesn't exist, after all. What does a win mean for the prize fighter? Not nearly as much as would the win for the businessman. Yes, a loss would be disastrous. But a win? Not the same gravity. Hopkins is supposed to win. In fact, many expect him to win—easily, if for no other reason than he's fighting a guy who started as a junior lightweight.

Maybe it's the first of several superfights for Hopkins so, in that sense, a victory for him is big. But by itself, a win over De La Hoya doesn't do that much for Hopkins the fighter, or for his legacy. It gets him another title defense closer to his goal. It gets him a second Hall of Fame name on his list of victims (Trinidad's probably the only other one so far). It gets him some screw-you money, and he gets to flip the bird to all of us who

said he was crazy as a loon. But all that's secondary. The bigger win was getting the fight in the first place.

For the rest of the world's middleweight-ish fighters, a win by Hopkins probably is better than a De La Hoya victory would be. Why? Opportunity. Whereas we think De La Hoya would take a superfight or two at 160 (likely against Trinidad) and be done with it, Hopkins says he wants 20 title defenses by the time he's done, and we wouldn't be surprised if, when he reaches 20, he decides he'd like five more. That's the kind of fighter he is—he challenges himself. Is he going to just walk away if he feels he can still do it? No way. He'll stay, we believe, until he feels he can't do it anymore, and then he'll get out. And judging by the looks of things, that will be a while yet.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

A defense against Olympian Taylor could be huge in a year or two

Also, Hopkins is married to 160 and understands his place in history; he will be recalled as a middleweight only, and he likes that; it's old-school. He's not a division-hopping star the way a lot of guys are. Maybe he'd move up for a one-shot deal with Antonio Tarver at 175, but that's it. There is no danger of him dropping down to 154 or something after the De La Hoya fight. He can sit right at 160 and wait for the big fights—against Trinidad, against Winky Wright, maybe De La Hoya again, maybe Shane Mosley. And at the same time, he can continue to slap around this or that silly alphabet mandatory. He can entertain challenges from guys like Ricardo Mayorga if he likes, or Verno Phillips or Felix Sturm. He can probably do that for another 10 years. The point is, Hopkins has two goals: to make money and title defenses. That's excellent news for everyone around 160 pounds. Everyone will prosper.

Here's another reason the division benefits: After a title defense or two, say a year to 18 months down the road, Jermain Taylor will be ready to take Hopkins on. Or at least, he'll think he's ready. Or his people will. And they might be right by then, considering Hopkins' age. Taylor has been moved well and looks a little better almost every time out. The natural progression, if he's the real deal, would be to move him toward a big middleweight title fight with the old man and to build it up big—a changing of the guard and all that. Don't laugh. Those are the kinds of stories that drive interest in the fight game, junior. They never get old, and no matter who wins, it's good for the class.

Even if a win for Hopkins is preferable for the middleweight division, it's undeniable that it wouldn't be as good for the sport overall, at least in the short term, as would a victory for De La Hoya. It's true that to the hardcore faithful, a Hopkins win would feel vindicating; it would confirm that coming up the hard way, without a medal and without a slew of bogus alphabet titles, is still worth something in the long run. It would validate (somewhat ironically), Hopkins' loyalty to Fisher, to his hometown of Philadelphia, and to his principles. Within a fight game context, it would represent, not entirely fairly mind you, a victory for the have-nots over the haves; an ex-con who pulled himself together and won out over not only "The Golden Boy," but over the fight game's myriad nefarious thugs and villains. Again, it's not an entirely accurate picture, but it's a good story.

There's only one problem: Outside of the hardcore, hardly anyone knows it. And they'll never get to know it. The game is full of wonderful stories just like it that few will ever hear because the vehicle doesn't exist to convey them to the masses, which, rather sadly, is the barometer these days for measuring how "good" something is for the business. Hopkins isn't the vehicle, either. No matter how good the story is, he can't sell it to anyone who isn't already a fight junkie. He's not the guy to do it. America isn't ready for him as a salesman. De La Hoya they're ready for. His story isn't as full of "us against them" vigor, but the sell is often in the sizzle, not the steak. Hopkins is all steak. ■

PARTING SHOT

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

The Three Amigos: Promoter Bob Arum introduces De La Hoya and Hopkins at a press conference held in swank Beverly Hills in late-June. Arum is calling the fight "Quest For History," which it undoubtedly is, but it is also a quest for money. All three men are already millionaires, and will greatly enhance their bank accounts on September 18. The pay-per-view industry and Las Vegas will also reap financial benefits from what promises to be a box office blockbuster. No wonder these guys can afford such expensive-looking suits.

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